THE GLENLITTEN MURDER

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BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1929

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Published August, 1929

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER I

GLENLITTEN, although a country house of antiquity and tradition, was in these modern days a free and easy place, so far as the entertainment of its guests was concerned. The state drawing-rooms were seldom opened, and the general meeting place for cocktails before dinner and coffee afterwards was the great hall which had been transformed into a lounge, and which led into the old picture gallery, now a ballroom. Andrew Glenlitten, sixth Marquis, sunburnt, blue-eyed, in appearance and speech younger than his thirty-two years, moved cheerfully about amongst his guests, superintending the service of cocktails.

"Sorry my wife's a few minutes late, Dick," he apologised, resting his hand for a moment affectionately upon the shoulder of the famous criminal lawyer. "My fault, I am afraid. We went down to see old Heggs about the stands for to-morrow, and he kept us gassing for over an hour."

"I am looking forward immensely to meeting your wife," Sir Richard observed, helping himself, after a moment's hesitation, to a second cocktail. "Are we a large party?"

"A very small one," his host replied. "There's yourself, my sister Susan—you haven't forgotten her, of course?"

"Scarcely," Cotton acknowledged, glancing towards a fair-haired, good-natured looking woman,

apparently a few years older than her brother, who was curled up upon a sofa, smoking a cigarette and reading the evening paper. "We don't meet much nowadays, but I was nearly her godfather. Who is the tall, thin man with an eyeglass? I don't seem to remember him."

"You probably wouldn't," his host remarked. "His name is Haslam—Rodney Haslam. He is a commissioner out in West Africa. Then there's Jimmy Manfield, talking to De Besset. Jimmy was at Eton with me—no end of a swell in the county now. They've just made him Lord Lieutenant. De Besset, you wouldn't know, I suppose. He is a Frenchman, and a very good fellow—a great polo player and gambler—but I don't fancy he's much use with a gun. His people own all the land round where Félice was brought up, and she and I ran across him at Deauville. Then that's Lady Manfield—the dark little woman talking to Bobby."

"Bobby who?" Sir Richard queried.

"Bobby Grindells. You'll come across him later in life if he's in luck. He's a youthful barrister—a good sort, and, although I'm not cadging, an odd brief wouldn't do him any harm. The elderly gentleman in the corner is Doctor Meadows, our local practitioner. That's every one, I think, except two fellows who are coming over from the barracks—oh, and they're bringing a guest with them—a Russian *emigré*—Prince something or other. . . . Ah, here's Félice at last!"

Sir Richard turned toward the great oak staircase, and, although he was rather a hardened old person as regards the other sex, a little murmur of admiration, purely involuntary, escaped him. The appearance of the girl who was slowly descending the wide oak staircase, making what was almost her *début* as hostess of Glenlitten, was so entirely unexpected by the majority of her assembled guests that the momentary lull in the conversation which had seemed at first a merely natural effort at politeness, seemed afterwards to lapse into a silence possessed of peculiar and pulsating qualities. They were all used to the sight of beautiful women—their portraits lined both walls of the staircase down which Félice was slowly descending—but about this girl, or child, as she appeared, there were other qualities. She was exquisitely small, with light golden hair of dazzling smoothness. Her brown eyes were deep-set, and looked larger than ever under her dark eyebrows. Her lips were a little parted and the fingers of her right hand clung close to the smooth balustrade. She was rather like a frightened child in her gown of shimmering white and in her obvious nervousness—the single note of possible maturity the exquisite diamonds which flashed upon her throat and neck. Suddenly her eyes met her husband's, as he stepped eagerly forward to meet her, and she seemed transformed. The hesitation passed from her movements, a brilliant smile answered his. She came gravely forward to be embraced by her sister-in-law, to greet

those of the guests whom she had met, and to be introduced by her husband to the others.

"And this, Félice," the latter concluded, "is one of our great family friends, Sir Richard Cotton. You would have met him before, but he has been in the States for some months. Dick, I hope that you and Félice will be great friends."

"I do hope so, indeed," she said, speaking very slowly and with an obvious effort to make her accent as little noticeable as possible. "My husband has spoken of you often, Sir Richard. You are the clever man, are you not, who sends people to prison?"

"Sometimes," he reminded her, smiling, "I try to keep them out."

They were all crowding around her now except De Besset, who stood upon the outside of the little circle, watching her with a look purely Gallic in character, the look of a man who can watch without speech or movement. She took a cocktail from the tray and laughed and talked with every one. Once she met De Besset's eyes and smiled naturally and happily at him.

"You too must drink a cocktail, Comte de Besset," she begged. "See, it is my first act as hostess—I pass it to you."

She took one of the richly cut glasses from the tray and handed it across. De Besset accepted it with a bow. He looked over for a moment at his host.

"Madame," he murmured, "I drink to the great good fortune of the House of Glenlitten."

"Do you know, Lady Glenlitten," Haslam remarked, leaning over her, "I thought when you appeared upon the stairs just now that a touch of our West African magic had stolen into your veins. You walked as though you were in a trance."

She looked at him with an appealing little uplift of her eyebrows.

"I was so nervous," she confessed. "It is the first time that we have received friends. The house is so large. These stairs are so wide, the ceilings so high, those pictures so huge, that I felt smaller than ever. I can scarcely believe that it is really I who am here. In France, the little château where I was brought up was full of quaint, tiny rooms, and my guardian who lived there had not much money, so all the furniture was just Provençal, and homely. I did not see the inside of any other house, and here is something so wonderfully different."

"You will have to get used to it, my dear," her husband remarked, resting his hand for a moment caressingly upon her arm. "You're here for keeps, you know. What about dinner? Is there any one else? Oh, of course, those fellows from the barracks. Here they are, thank God!"

Parkins, the butler, was approaching with his usual smooth, sedate walk, followed by the three expected guests. The two first were of the ordinary British type. The third was obviously a foreigner. He was fair-haired, unusually tall, rather full of feature for the young man he undoubtedly was, and

with a drooping line about his clean-shaven mouth which spoiled his otherwise not disagreeable appearance. Glenlitten stepped forward to meet them.

"Fraser and Philipson, isn't it?" he said, holding out his hand. "So glad the Colonel could spare you both. I see you have brought your friend."

"Thanks to your kindness, Lord Glenlitten," the senior of the two men observed. "May I introduce Prince Charles of Suess—the Marquis of Glenlitten."

Glenlitten shook hands with a pleasant word of greeting. Then he turned around.

"I must present you to my wife," he said. "This is almost her first appearance down here, and she is, as you may have heard, partly a compatriot of yours."

For a single second a sense of something unusual throbbed in the atmosphere, which a moment before was gay with light-hearted conversation and chaff. Once more Félice seemed to be fighting against the nervousness which had brought her so timidly down the stairs to greet her guests. She stared past the two men at the tall figure behind, and in her eyes there was an utterly untranslatable light. Then the sound of her husband's cheery voice dissolved the situation as though by magic.

"My dear," he said, "I want to present to you two of my officer neighbours from the barracks here—Major Fraser and Captain Philipson. This is their friend too, Prince Charles of Suess. My wife, Lady Glenlitten."

She was herself again, grave, slower even than usual in her halting speech, but with the ghost of a smile upon her child's lips.

"I am very glad to have you come to us and to know that we are neighbours," she said, shaking hands with the two men. "How do you do, Prince Charles. I too am half Russian, but, alas, I was four years old when I left the country, so I fear that we shall not be able to indulge in reminiscences."

Her fingers rested for a moment in the hand of the young man who towered over her.

"It is perhaps as well," he said gravely. "There are few things one cares to remember concerning our unhappy country."

Parkins once more made his dignified appearance.

"My lady," he announced, "dinner is served."

There was no lack of conversation at dinner time, mostly of the chaffing, good-humoured type common in these days amongst those more or less intimate. Manfield thought that his host was off on a wild-goose chase, trying to kill partridges on the first of September with so much corn standing. Glenlitten chaffed his old schoolfellow about his weakness for big bags and late shooting.

"I like to go after 'em early, and go often," he declared. "Leave the cheepers alone, of course, but get at the old 'uns before they're wild. My stands aren't so good for driving as yours."

The two soldier men, who hoped for invitations

from both, sympathized with each point of view. De Besset explained the misunderstood French attitude with regard to the slaying of game, and Prince Charles contributed some anecdotes of bags in Hungary which sounded almost fantastic. Sir Richard Cotton and Manfield succeeded apparently in entertaining and being entertained by their hostess, and Grindells, who was already establishing the reputation of a professional diner-out, was chipping in wherever he thought a word or two useful.

"I've got a grudge against you, Sir Richard," Manfield declared across the table. "You shouldn't have been so devilish clever about that poor fellow Johnson. If any one else had been in your place he'd have got off, and quite right too."

"Think so?" the lawyer observed equably. "That wasn't exactly my idea."

"Johnson was a good fellow," Manfield went on; "fought in the war, popular everywhere, and there were some very ugly rumours about the man he killed."

"This is England, not France," Sir Richard reminded them calmly. "If a man commits a murder here, and I am for the Crown, it is my duty to have him found guilty, whatever the provocation may have been. It may not be justice perhaps, sometimes, but the bases of the law are sound. Here and there one poor fellow must suffer that a great principle may remain."

"Nevertheless," Manfield insisted. "I say that the

case of Johnson is one more nail in the coffin of this rigid administration of exact laws. It is circumstances, not actual deeds, which decide guilt."

"In West Africa," Haslam put in, "we are compelled often to abandon statutes altogether in dealing with the natives. Every now and then, the good man kills the black sheep who richly deserves it. I won't say that we pat the good man on the back, but we don't hang him."

"In an uncivilised country," Sir Richard remarked, "you naturally have more latitude. Here, where every man and woman can read the newspapers and understands the code of the laws, justice must be differently administered."

"I am afraid, Sir Richard," Félice murmured, "that you are a very cruel man."

He smiled.

"I try to fancy myself a just one."

She looked at his straight, firm mouth, the legal type, without twitch or droop, the lean, clean-shaven face, and the clear, grey eyes.

"I think if I had done wrong," she confided, "I would not like it to be you who tried to convince the jury that I must be punished."

He smiled at her once more with the tolerance one shows to a child.

"Lady Glenlitten," he assured her, "I should refuse the brief. I should plunge myself into the fray on the other side."

"Now you are becoming more human," she con-

ceded. "I like people who say nice things to me, and what you have said just now is chivalrous."

"Don't you trust him, Lady Glenlitten," Manfield advised her. "He's as hard as a flint. You should have heard how merciless he was about that poor fellow Johnson, who was hung last week. Dash it all, if a man commits suicide, you allow him a verdict of 'Suicide during temporary insanity', by which you clear him of guilt; why shouldn't murder sometimes be committed in a fit of 'temporary insanity'?"

"It very often is," Sir Richard acknowledged. "There are a great many men who habitually lose their temper, who might be considered technically at times to be in a state of temporary insanity. On the other hand, you couldn't frame laws to meet such a condition."

"I wish some one would tell me," Grindells observed, "why crime and everything to do with crime has such a fascination for people nowadays. Every one seems to be dabbling in criminology. I was junior in the Hassell case a short time ago, and I should think I had a hundred applications from well-known people to try to get them into Court."

Sir Richard nodded.

"My office is sometimes besieged."

"I wonder what it would feel like to commit a real crime," Félice reflected. "I think sometimes it must be very difficult, if one hates any one very much and knows that they go about doing evil, to keep from it if the opportunity comes."

"There were some very interesting statistics published the other day," Glenlitten remarked from the other end of the table. "Taking the three supposedly most civilised countries, the estimate was that seventy-five per cent. of the murders in the world were committed for the sake of, or on account of, a woman, twenty per cent. for financial reasons, including robberies, and the remainder for no particular cause."

"I," Prince Charles intervened, "have seen such murders—murders committed for no particular cause. I have seen many of them. I have seen men start by killing people because they believed they were political enemies, and then I have seen them go mad and rush about killing any one, killing just for the sake of killing. I have seen the blood fever. It is a terrible thing."

Félice shivered a little. Her husband promptly interposed.

"Too much of this talk about crime," he declared cheerfully. "Dick, did you start talking shop?"

"Not I," was the prompt reply. "When I come out for a holiday I like to believe in my fellow creatures."

"If you had the misfortune," Prince Charles said gloomily, joining once more in the conversation, "to be of my nationality, crime as a subject would not appeal to you. Fortunately for our hostess," he added, with a little bow towards Félice, "she was too young for those horrors, but for myself I saw things, when I was young too—barely seventeen—of which

I could not speak, to think of which, even now, makes me shudder."

They looked at him with curiosity. Félice was gazing steadily down the table towards the opposite wall. She had the appearance of one trying to close her senses, to hear nothing of that still, expressionless voice.

"You were in Russia during the revolution?" Glenlitten asked.

"I was training to be a soldier," the Prince replied. "Many of my relatives were murdered, our estates were seized, the escape of my family was a miracle of which we do not even now dare to speak. Still, none of us will forget; it would be impossible."

There was a moment's silence. Every one was interested in the tall, young figure with the cold, grey eyes, seated upright at the table, head and shoulders taller than his neighbours. Suddenly came an interruption from outside. There was a low rumble, and the windows shook. Félice started.

"What's that?" some one exclaimed.

"Thunder," Glenlitten groaned. "I was rather afraid of it."

Félice rose to her feet. The moment had arrived.

"I do not like thunder," she confessed, a little tremulously. "Lady Manfield, do you wish to come, yes? Lady Susan?"

"Susan, my dear," her sister-in-law corrected her. "Of course I am ready—and thunder never hurt anybody. Not even the lightning can touch this

house: I am sometimes angry with Andrew, he has so many of those hideous conductors nestling around the chimneys."

The women passed out, gossiping together. Prince Charles, from his place amongst the little semicircle of men who had risen to their feet, held up his glass.

"I shall give you a Russian toast," he said, "but I shall translate it into English. It is— 'May this house be always free from wind and storm and evil that comes from men.' "

CHAPTER II

The silence of the room, the state bedchamber of the chatelaine of Glenlitten, seemed indeed to be a part of its exceeding charm, unportentous of the gathering storm. Yet there was about it, an hour or so later, a suggestion of recent haste: a tangle of exquisite silks and lingerie lay in disorder upon a deep armchair, with one daintily shaped silk stocking hanging over the arm. Upon the dressing table were scattered a variety of jewels—a diamond necklace whose gems sparkled brilliantly even in the dim rose-tinted illumination of the shaded light which stood by the bedside, a medley of rings with great lustrous stones, lying here and there as though they had been torn from the fingers with the same passionate haste as the little filmy wilderness of zephyr-like clothing from the body. The single bed, with its gilt posts and Cupids, lay cool and empty, the pink sheets turned down, the lace-edged pillow invitingly soft and luxurious. Even the Watteau shepherdesses upon the silk-panelled walls seemed to have paused in their gambollings to wonder at the silence. The curtains from one of the latticed windows had been drawn back, and outside in the park the trees stood stiff and stark in the moonlight, as yet too faint and fitful to do more than give their outline. From somewhere far away came the distant mutterings of a passing storm. An angry peacock shrieked from the terrace; an owl in one of the belted spin-

neys indulged now and then in his melancholy call. The faint rhythm of dance music stole up the great stairs from the hall below, with occasionally the shuffling of moving feet, a trill of laughter, the clapping of hands, and from down the long stretch of corridor came the sounds of muffled movements as the maids and valets passed in and out of the rooms they were preparing for the night. All this background of outside sounds seemed somehow to intensify the breathless stillness of this empty chamber. There was something delicately Oriental about its deserted charm, as though the fairy princess of some fairy monarch had passed through in haste to her lord's apartments. Another rumble of distant thunder, now almost negligible, a livelier tune from below, a queer little padding sound in the gardens. Then the sanctified silence of the room itself was broken. Very slowly the inner door near the window was pushed open. Félice stole softly in, and with the same noiselessness closed the door behind her. She was clad in a *peignoir* of pale silk trimmed with fur, and for the mistress of a great house, the bearer of a great name, she seemed very small, even pathetic: her luminous eyes were dilated, as though in the throes of some terrible fear, yet still, like lamps of fire. Inside the room she paused and stood shivering with fright, looking tremulously around. Its silence, however, and the sound of the music from downstairs brought her a shade of reassurance. She moved uncertainly towards the bedside, turned down the sheets a little

lower, and, without removing her *peignoir*, slipped between them. The music, with its message of reassurance, grew louder. She closed her eyes after one more half-terrified glance around. Her breathing became more regular. Her small white hand stole out and touched the switch of the lamp by her bedside. She seemed to breathe in the darkness joyfully.

Perhaps she dozed—she was never sure. Suddenly, however, she opened her eyes with a strange sensation of terror. A breath of air had stolen into the room, a hand, barely visible, moved the fastening, and the window stood wide open. The hand lingered upon the shelf. She stared at it fascinated. Her own fingers, which had crept out towards the switch, paused as though paralysed. She heard the sound of her name called breathlessly from behind the inner door which led to her bathroom.

"Lady Glenlitten!"

She was powerless to reply. There seemed to be some vague movement of that cumbrous form which obscured the night, and suddenly through the window she looked into a pair of eyes. She heard the chink of jewels. Some one was bending over her dressing table. The door of her sitting room was swung open. The white shirt front of a man gleamed in the darkness. She made one more effort. This time her fingers reached the switch, but they pressed it in vain. A sudden darkness seemed to have fallen upon the whole world. The reflection of the lights from other parts of the house was suddenly dimmed.

Against the background of exclamations from the corridors and halls below came other and more terrible sounds close at hand—a flash of yellow fire across the room, a sharp report, a groan, and the sound of a heavy fall. That was all the little Marchioness knew of what took place in those few seconds, for when they found her she was lying across the bed unconscious.

Throughout the great house, after the first shock of surprise at this sudden blanket of darkness, there was a certain amount of half-amused commotion. Servants came hurrying from their quarters with lamps and candles of every description. Upstairs there were the mingled sounds of scuffling, laughter, and subdued chaff, and in course of time little tongues of light appeared upon the landings and in most of the rooms. The library where Andrew Glenlitten had been playing bridge, with his sister, Major Fraser and Grindells, was perhaps the best served for illumination, owing to its considerable collection of inherited Georgian candlesticks, but Glenlitten excused himself temporarily from continuing the game. He summoned Sir Richard, who was reading the *Times* before the fire.

"Come and take my place, Dick," he begged. "I must go and see if Félice is scared to death."

Sir Richard folded up the *Times*, rose to his feet, and strolled across the room. Glenlitten, pausing to exchange a few remarks with the younger crowd who

had recommenced dancing, mounted the great stairs, carrying a candle in his hand. On the first corridor he met a perturbed lady's maid.

"Have you been in to see her ladyship, Annette?" he enquired.

The woman answered him in rapid French.

"Milord, I cannot enter. The door is locked."

"Ridiculous!" he answered brusquely. "It has never been locked since we have been here."

He passed swiftly on into his own apartments and turned the handle of the connecting door between his dressing room and his wife's bedroom. To his surprise, he found that the maid was right; it was certainly locked. He knocked on the panels, softly at first, and then louder. There was no reply.

"Félice!" he called out. "Félice!"

"Milady!" Annette cried, shaking the handle of the other door.

Still no reply. Glenlitten, by this time genuinely alarmed, hastened down the corridor, made his way along a short passage, and tried the handle of another door. To his relief it opened. He passed into a large and very beautiful bathroom, now in darkness, but still faintly impregnated with the odours and perfumes of feminine use—the odours of bath salts, flower-distilled waters, and scented soaps. He hurried through the adjoining sitting room, and, scarcely pausing to knock at the inner door, turned the handle with a prayer in his heart. Holding the candle high above his head, he entered his wife's

apartment. A step across the threshold, and the heavy candlestick nearly slipped from his shaking fingers. He stopped with a little gasp—a strong man sick with shock. Lying only a few feet away, with an ominous patch of red staining his white shirt, lay the man whom since the threatened storm every one had been missing—the Comte de Besset, the famous French polo player, golfer and reputed millionaire. And across the bed, as white and still as death itself, Félice!

CHAPTER III

THERE are seconds, even minutes, in one's life which one loses forever. Andrew Glenlitten was never able to remember crossing the room or setting down the candlestick, as he must have done, with steady fingers by the side of the bed. He remembered only his first convulsive clasp of that still, inanimate form, his low cry of passion as he folded his arms around her. Of the dead man lying behind, he took no note. It was like a minor incident which had passed from his apprehension.

"Félice, you aren't hurt, dear? Open your eyes! Félice!"

She gave a little moan, and a great relief swept into his heart. He heard the maid sobbing to herself behind him, and he spoke to her without turning his head.

"Get down below as quickly as you can," he ordered. "Fetch Doctor Meadows and Sir Richard Cotton. Don't make any mistake, mind. The doctor and Sir Richard."

"I cannot pass," the woman half sobbed, half shrieked. "Upon the carpet there! It is Monsieur le Comte. He is dead. There has been a crime!"

Glenlitten turned fiercely around, seized her by the shoulders and half pushed, half carried her to the corridor door. He unlocked it and thrust her out into the candle-lit gloom.

"Do as you are told," he insisted sternly. "The doctor—he is about somewhere—and Sir Richard is playing bridge in the library. Say nothing to any one else. Don't let any one else come up."

Back to the room. It seemed to him that Félice had stirred slightly. He kissed her eyes and her lips, and he felt a warm breath come faintly out. Suddenly she moved a little and raised one arm, which found its trembling way round his neck.

"Félice, my love!" he murmured. "Lie still. Soon you will be better."

She moaned once more, but this time there seemed to be something more of relief than pain in the strangled murmur. He held her tightly until he was conscious of approaching footsteps, and the two men entered the room. He turned around.

"This way, Meadows," he cried. "Quick!"

He disengaged himself gently from her arms, which, feeble though their strength was, seemed to cling. The doctor took his place. Glenlitten looked on anxiously during his brief examination.

"Ring for hot water, sal volatile, or brandy," the doctor enjoined. "She'll be all right presently."

Glenlitten touched the bell. Annette, recovered, was already at hand. The news was spreading.

"Keep every one out of the room," the doctor insisted. "Give her another five or ten minutes."

"There's no wound, or hurt of any sort?" Glenlitten asked.

"Nothing at all," the doctor replied reassuringly.

"Shock—nothing but shock. She'll do all right now. Let me pass, please."

Glenlitten stood reluctantly on one side. In those few moments the greater tragedy scarcely existed for him. It was only when he saw the gentle rise and fall of Félice's bosom, watched the colour stealing back to her cheeks, that he turned around and joined the doctor and Sir Richard.

"De Besset!" he muttered, as he looked down at the body of the dead man. "In here! How on earth—"

As swiftly as the vague horror had rushed into his brain, he rejected it. Whatever had happened, it was not that.

"It seems useless to guess at what has happened," Sir Richard pronounced, "until Lady Glenlitten can tell what she knows. So far as one can see, either De Besset has shot himself, or been shot by some one else. We had better telephone for the police. We can't do anything more until Meadows has made his examination."

Glenlitten nodded. His brain was still cloudy, but dimly he was beginning to remember. He made his way stealthily back to the communicating door between his own and his wife's bedroom, turned the key softly, with a backward glance at Sir Richard, did the same thing to the other door, and gave orders to his own servant whom he found standing with a little throng around the banisters.

"Clear all these people away, Brooks," he in-

structed, "and don't let any one else come upstairs for the present. No one is to enter these rooms. Try to keep the servants as quiet as you can, and telephone at once to the police station, and ask the sergeant to come up."

"Very good, my lord."

"What happened to the lights? Has any one found out yet?"

"The cable seems to have been cut, my lord—wilfully cut," Brooks confided, as he hurried off. "I have sent down to the engineer's shop for some one to come up and see what they can do."

"The cable cut from outside." The words seemed to contain little of significance to Glenlitten's numb brain, and yet in a way they were a relief. The tragedy had spread farther, at any rate, than those four walls. He made his way back to Félice's bedroom and, pausing by the side of the dead man, looked down at him thoughtfully. He remembered with a little pang that he had been rather inclined to dislike him at Deauville, when Félice had first shyly introduced him, had found his manners too elegant, his speech too stilted, his attentions to Félice a trifle too eager, his talk about women a little too loose and free. These things lay far away now, however. His only feeling was one of great pity. De Besset had loved life so much, had been so gay upon his arrival, so happy at the prospect of joining in the English sport. Less than an hour ago he had been dancing—and now he lay there crumpled up, dead, shot, mur-

dered. By whom? A wave of insurgent horror swept once more into Glenlitten's brain. A tragedy like this in the bedroom of his wife! He was a proud man, and for the first time there was something personal in his horror. He looked towards the bed. Félice was sitting up, and the doctor beckoned to him.

"Sit by her side," he whispered, "but don't ask her any questions yet."

He took the doctor's place. Her arms slipped round his neck. He sank upon his knees by the side of the bed. He smoothed her hands, raised them to his lips and kissed them, but kept silent. Then, for the first time, she spoke. She pointed feebly towards Sir Richard, who had been opening and closing the doors of the wardrobes and was now leaning out of the wide-flung window.

"Please send him away," she faltered. "I do not want any one else in the room. The doctor may stop, but not—not Sir Richard Cotton."

He kissed her forehead.

"There is a reason," he assured her, "why Sir Richard had better stay for a little time."

She turned her head away. It was almost a child's attitude of pouting. The doctor took her wrist between his thumb and fingers, and Glenlitten rose to his feet. Sir Richard was standing in the corner by the window, with his back to the wall, studying the room as though he wished every detail of it photographed in his memory.

"What sort of a man is your local police sergeant?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Fairly intelligent, I think."

"There is no doubt," Sir Richard pointed out, "that an entry has been made to the room by this window from below."

"An entry through the window?" Glenlitten gasped. "But why?"

"Your wife's jewels, of course," Sir Richard answered, a little impatiently. "What else do you suppose? Where are they?"

"Damn the jewels! I don't know. Her maid would see that those were put away, I expect."

Sir Richard shook his head. He patted his host's shoulder.

"Andrew," he said, "you must pull yourself together. Her ladyship is recovering from her faint. The doctor has no anxiety about her at all. Listen. There has been a murder or a suicide committed here, and we must do our best to get to the bottom of it. Let us go into your bedroom and send for your wife's maid. She will be able to tell us where she put the jewels when she undressed her mistress. Remember, your wife was wearing the famous diamonds."

Glenlitten cast one longing look towards the bed. The doctor waved him away, but this time with a smile and a nod of reassurance.

"You'll be able to talk to your wife in five minutes," he promised. "I just want her to have a

spoonful more brandy and then close her eyes."

The two men tiptoed their way to Glenlitten's bedroom and closed the door. In response to Sir Richard's order, Brooks, who was waiting outside, hurried away to fetch the maid. He returned with her almost at once.

"Can I go to her ladyship, milord?" Annette begged.

"Not just yet," Sir Richard insisted. "Tell me, will you, where are her ladyship's jewels kept?"

"In the safe, monsieur. It is let into the wall," the woman explained. "Milord can open it from his side, or milady from hers."

"Stop, I don't quite follow her," Sir Richard interrupted. "My French is rotten. What does she say, Glenlitten?"

"We have a safe," the latter explained, "built with double doors, one in her room, and one in mine, so that either of us can open it. There it is, you see."

"Ask her if she put the jewels there when she undressed her ladyship to-night?"

Glenlitten framed the question. The girl looked at him, her black eyes round with wonder.

"But to-night," she explained, "I did not undress her ladyship at all. I have not seen her jewels. She sent word that she did not wish for my attendance. I was dancing in the servants' hall, and milady desired me to remain there."

"I didn't notice any jewels lying about in the

room," Sir Richard remarked, "but I watched your wife coming downstairs. Surely she was wearing Queen Charlotte's necklace."

Glenlitten nodded.

"Yes, I think she was," he assented carelessly. "She may have put them away herself. I'll get my key and see presently."

"Does her ladyship often undress herself?" Sir Richard persisted, in stumbling French.

"*Mais jamais, Monsieur,*" the maid replied—"Never, never, never! *J'étais même étonnée, mais milady a insisté.*"

They made their way back to the bedroom. Félice smiled at them both when they entered. Then her husband thought no more about the jewels. He hurried over to her side. Once more her arms went round his neck and her head rested upon his shoulder.

"Andrew," she murmured, "I have been so frightened—so terrified. There was shooting—here, in this room. And the lights all went out. Who is it that is hurt?"

"You shall hear everything presently, dear," he assured her. "You and I are not hurt, at any rate, or any one we care much about. Let us be selfish, dear, until you are a little stronger."

She clung to him convulsively. Suddenly the newly arrived colour began to fade from her cheeks. Behind her husband she saw Sir Richard standing gravely in the background.

"May I ask one question?" the latter begged.

Her arms tightened round Glenlitten's neck until they seemed as though they would choke him.

"Andrew," she pleaded, "I cannot think. Send him away."

"Oh, damn the necklace!" Glenlitten muttered, turning angrily around. "Can't you see, Dick, Félice is not fit to be questioned."

"The necklace," she repeated. "It is on the dressing table with my rings and bracelets. I took everything off quickly. I was frightened. My head ached, and I was in a hurry to get into bed."

Sir Richard turned away without further speech. Outside there were voices in the corridor, and a heavy footfall. The doctor leaned over the bed.

"That is probably the sergeant outside," he announced. "He will have to come in and make his examination. Why not take your wife into your room?"

"Sure it won't hurt her?" Andrew asked anxiously.

"It will hurt her less than to see the police sergeant in the room, and to hear him asking questions."

Glenlitten took a handkerchief from his pocket and tied it round her eyes.

"But what is this that you do to me?" she cried softly.

"I want you to forget this room for a little time, dearest," he explained. "Now see, I am going to carry you into mine."

He took her into his arms. She was, after all, the lightest possible weight. He carried her across the

room, past that terrible object upon the floor, into his own apartment, and laid her upon the bed. The maid had followed them.

"Now I must go and talk to this fellow from the village," he said. "You must lie here. Annette will stay with you, and Doctor Meadows will be in the next room."

"I'll make her up a sleeping draught presently," the latter promised, "and she'll be quite all right in the morning."

She leaned towards her husband.

"Tell me before you go, Andrew," she begged, "who is it that is hurt?"

He hesitated, but she caught hold of his hand and drew him towards her.

"I must know," she insisted. "Tell me. Is it Raoul?"

"Raoul?" he repeated wonderingly.

"Raoul de Besset," she faltered.

There was once more a momentary return of that chill fear. He shook it off. "Raoul de Besset." To his knowledge it was the first time he had heard the young man's Christian name.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "it was De Besset."

She sank back upon the pillows. Her great eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. The doctor, with his fingers upon her pulse, motioned to Glenlitten, who turned and left the room.

In the next apartment a sergeant—in mufti, for he had been summoned from his bed—was kneeling

upon the ground, making a brief examination of the prostrate body. Sir Richard touched his host upon the shoulder and pointed towards the dressing table.

"Of course you realise," he whispered, "that the necklace has gone."

CHAPTER IV

For a man who has just lost jewels not only of great value, but family heirlooms, their owner's manner was amazing. He scarcely glanced towards the ransacked dressing table. For the first time he was really studying the gruesome sight upon the carpet.

"Of course the jewels have gone," he muttered. "I don't suppose a burglar would come in and commit murder for nothing."

"Murder!" the sergeant repeated, with protruding eyes. "The man is dead then?" he added, producing a bulky notebook from his pocket.

"Stone dead. Shot through the heart," Doctor Meadows answered. "Of course there is the question of suicide to be considered, but he is scarcely likely to have chosen this room for such a purpose; besides which, I think you will presently find traces of a third person's presence here."

The sergeant made a note in his book.

"Can you tell me his name?" he enquired.

"The Comte Raoul de Besset," Glenlitten answered, his tongue hesitating a little at the "Raoul." "He is a well-known sportsman and a visitor here for the shooting."

The sergeant looked round the room and leaned out of the window.

"You can search the place later," Sir Richard advised. "Are there any more questions you would like

to ask the doctor? He wants to get back to her ladyship."

The sergeant turned around, book in hand.

"Was the man shot from close to, or from a distance, do you think, sir?"

"I will make a further examination as to that. My own impression is that he was shot from at least half a dozen paces away. There are no signs of singeing on the shirt, or anything of that sort."

"By a bullet from an ordinary revolver?"

"A small automatic, I should think. I haven't much experience in these matters," the doctor added thoughtfully, "but I should say so. The wound is small but deadly."

"And how long should you say that he had been dead, sir?"

Meadows stooped down once more, felt the arms and legs, unbuttoned a little farther some of the clothing.

"Not long," he decided. "Two hours at the most."

The sergeant made another note. Then he turned to Glenlitten, and the doctor slipped back into the next room.

"I should like to know, my lord," he asked, "the circumstances under which the body was found and whether there was a witness to the crime."

"There was no actual witness to the crime," Glenlitten replied. "What happened was that the lights throughout the house went out, at about midnight. Presently I am going to ask you to examine the cable

which my electrician says was deliberately tampered with. I came upstairs to see if my wife, who had retired early, was frightened, and found her lying in a dead faint upon the bed there, this window, which is usually open only about two inches, wide open, traces which this gentleman, Sir Richard Cotton, who is a criminal lawyer, could point out to you, of some one having left or entered by the window, and the body of this man, dead. Have you got that?"

"I have, my lord," the man assented. "Seems a clear case of burglary and murder. Was the other gentleman saying something about jewels?"

"So far as we can tell at present, Sergeant," Sir Richard announced, "a number of her ladyship's jewels, including a diamond necklace of great value, have disappeared."

"It seems to me, my lord," the sergeant decided, looking once more through the window, "that the first thing to do is to put a few questions to her ladyship, and then search the grounds."

"Her ladyship cannot be approached," Glenlitten declared. "She was in a dead faint when she was found and is now in the hands of the physician. I am sure he will agree that she must be left alone until the morning. You have plenty to occupy yourself with. What about that open window and the missing jewels?"

"I think that Lord Glenlitten is right," Sir Richard observed. "It is useless to question her ladyship at present."

Both men turned their heads at the sound of the opening of the door. Haslam made his apologetic entrance, closing it firmly behind him.

"You'll forgive me, Andrew," he said. "I had to come up and see if there was anything I could do. There's a rumour downstairs that De Besset has been shot."

His host nodded.

"I'm afraid it is the truth," he admitted.

Haslam came slowly forward and looked down steadily at the crumpled-up figure upon the floor, the white face with its strange lack of expression, as colourless indeed as the thin cambric handkerchief which Meadows had left over the eyes. His gaze was a curiously intent one; his eyebrows were drawn together, his thin face seemed more saturnine than ever. Sir Richard watched him with an intentness which he scarcely troubled to conceal.

"How did he come in here?" Haslam asked at last, raising his head.

"That is a matter for later explanation," Glenlitten answered almost curtly. "It's very good of you to come up, but there's nothing any one can do for the moment. You might help us in the search we are going to make in the grounds. We shall be downstairs in a few minutes."

Glenlitten's suggestion of dismissal was apparent. With one lingering glance, Haslam turned around and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

"No friend of the dead man's, I should say," Sir Richard speculated.

"They disliked each other intensely," Andrew agreed. "We saw something of them both at Deauville this summer. Couldn't very well be helped. Félice knew De Besset's people—they own the château where she was brought up, and Haslam was at Eton with me. They never had a civil word to say to each other."

"Time we got along with the business on hand," Sir Richard suggested, turning back to the sergeant. "We don't want to elaborate any theories yet, of course, but this seems to me to be a possible reconstruction of what may have happened. De Besset must have been in his room for some reason or other, and either heard Lady Glenlitten call for help, or saw from his window a man climbing up the side of the house. He rushed here through her bathroom, found the burglar in the room and already collecting the jewels, and was shot through the heart. The sooner we're downstairs, Sergeant, searching for traces of a car in the avenue and examining the ground for footprints underneath, the better. There may be other theories to be exploited later, but this one is good enough to be getting on with."

The sergeant closed his book reluctantly. His bucolic instinct of obstinacy reasserted itself.

"I should have liked just a word with her ladyship," he persisted.

"To-morrow, or the next day, you can have it," Glenlitten told him sharply. "You don't suppose I am going to allow her ladyship to be worried now with questions when she's nearly prostrate with shock. Besides, what can she tell you? It is obvious that the man entered by that window; it is obvious that he escaped by it. Why don't you hurry up and be getting after him? You would rather finish this little affair off by yourself without sending for Scotland Yard, wouldn't you?"

The idea was an ecstatic one. The sergeant closed his book and the three men descended quietly by the back stairs. Glenlitten excused himself for a moment and made his way into the great hall. The remainder of the guests were sitting about in little groups, talking in whispers to one another, and it was obvious they were still suffering from the shock of the tragical news which they had just been told. The service of the house, however, was not being neglected. The usual array of nocturnal refreshments stood upon the great round table, and Haslam was officiating as host to Fraser and his young Russian friend. Glenlitten passed his arm through his sister's and spoke to all of them.

"I'm terribly sorry that our little party has been brought to such a sad end," he said. "My wife isn't hurt in any way, but she's had an awful shock. I daresay you know what has happened. There has been a burglary. De Besset, apparently, got wind of it and has been shot."

Lady Susan took his hand in hers and patted it.

"Don't you worry, my dear," she begged. "I'll take charge down here, and to-morrow we'll all clear off."

"I'm most frightfully sorry," he apologised, "but I don't really see what else there is to be done. We can't very well shoot until after the funeral, and there will be the inquest, and all that sort of bother. Make it up to you later on, I hope. It's too bad, Haslam, that you and Grindells have had such a long journey for nothing, and I only hope you'll be able to come down later on. I'll fix a date as soon as we've got over this wretched business. The birds have got to be killed somehow or other."

"Never mind about us," Haslam begged him. "I don't think we're any of us so tied that we can't get away for a day or two whenever it suits you."

"I hope not," Glenlitten rejoined, mixing himself a whisky and soda. "As for you fellows at the barracks, you have a standing invitation. I can always do with a couple of guns. If Prince Charles is down again, you must bring him along one day."

"I thank you indeed," the latter said. "It will please me very much to shoot English partridges."

"Tell me, shall I go up and see Félice?" Lady Susan asked.

"You might go up, if you will," her brother assented. "You can find out from Meadows whether she would like to have you with her. They are giving her a sleeping draught, and perhaps Meadows

may prefer her left alone. I'm terribly afraid that whatever happened—she saw it."

No one asked another question. They were really a very well-bred lot of people, and presently Andrew finished his drink and hurried out to the avenue. Sir Richard and the sergeant were bending over a certain spot amongst the flower beds which bordered the front of the house, with a little group of servants in the background. The former held an electric torch in his hand.

"There's been a man up here without a doubt," he announced. "We found that ladder, which belongs to the gardeners' sheds, and which you see reaches as far as the cornice above the library window. From there, he must have hooked a silk or rope ladder to the balcony—easy enough if he were an expert. He must have known the habits of the household, for he made for the window which I understand that her ladyship always has open, so that he could get in without making a sound."

"Left any traces down below?" Glenlitten asked.

Sir Richard pointed to where a little semicircle of handkerchiefs lay upon the ground.

"There are some footprints there," he confided. "We've marked them off, and I'm going to have one of the boys from the house stay around until morning. Now the thing is, which way did the man go from here? If I remember rightly, Andrew, there's a road from the woodsheds and carpenters' quarters which crosses the avenue, passes through the Home

Wood, and leads down into the main road."

"That's right," Glenlitten assented. "There it is, about fifty yards on the other side of the main avenue."

"My idea is," Sir Richard continued, "that our friend would leave the car somewhere in the shadow of the trees there. He wouldn't use the main drive for fear of meeting some of your guests coming or going. I propose we go down there and see. First of all, though, has any one got a revolver?"

"I have," Glenlitten announced, touching his pocket. "I took it out of my drawer before I left my room."

They trooped off—leaving the main avenue in a few minutes by the road Sir Richard had described. They walked about fifty yards down it without discovering anything. Then Sir Richard, leading the way up a rough track which ended, in a few yards, in a clearing in the wood, gave vent to a little exclamation. He directed his torch to the ground and motioned the others not to come too near.

"A car has been standing here recently," he announced. "Look, there are a couple of matches upon the ground and a half-burnt cigarette."

He picked the latter up and handed it to the sergeant.

"The match has been freshly lit," he continued. "You can tell that by the condition of the wood, and the burnt end is scarcely cold. The man whom we are after left his car here, came back to it, dropped

the first cigarette, lit another, and drove off down—don't you call it the Middle Way, Andrew?"

"The Middle Way," the latter assented. "It leads to the village of Charlton, and there isn't a turning on either side."

"A good three miles," the sergeant murmured. "Lucky I've got my bicycle."

"I don't think," Sir Richard reflected, "that there's anything further we can do to help you for the moment, Sergeant. If you take my advice, you will mark off this little section of land until the morning, fetch that bicycle you were speaking of, and get down to the village as quickly as you can. Never mind waking the people up. Try everywhere you can to find out if any one has seen or heard a car go by at any time within the last two hours. From what I can see of the ground there, I don't believe it was anything more than a two-seater, or perhaps a Ford."

"Would you mind telling me your name, sir?" the police sergeant begged. "His lordship did mention it, but I should like to have it in my book."

"My name is Sir Richard Cotton. I am fairly well-known as a criminal lawyer."

"Do you think I ought to telephone Scotland Yard, sir?"

Sir Richard looked down that long "Middle Way." For half a mile or so it seemed to pass through a tunnel of leaning trees. Afterwards there was a long stretch of open country, shimmering in the moon-

light. There were many things which flashed through the lawyer's mind in those few moments whilst the sergeant waited anxiously for his decision.

"I believe in doing everything to help establish the truth, Sergeant," he said calmly. "At the same time, I've seen many cases in which the local police have done all the work, and some one from Scotland Yard has come down and got the credit."

"That's so, sir," the sergeant assented with much eagerness. "That there arson case last year now. We were on the man's tracks all right, but the Chief Constable, he wasn't satisfied. He got one of them big men down from Scotland Yard who just went on with our work and got all the credit."

Sir Richard nodded understandingly.

"Unless Lord Glenlitten is of another opinion," he said, "I should give you a chance. Leave Scotland Yard alone for the moment, and see what you can do for yourself. You'll ring up your own Chief Constable at Winchester, of course, and he can decide if he wants the London men down. You seem to have picked the thing up very well. You'll get an impression of those footprints under the window, naturally, also of the tyres of the car for several revolutions. You will make all the usual enquiries as to whether any one suspicious has been hanging about lately. In short, go about the job your own way. If you fail utterly, there'll be time enough then to ask for help."

"That'll suit me fine, sir," the sergeant acquiesced.

"Charlton be but a small place, and it'll be a queer thing if some one or other didn't hear which way the car went."

They turned back towards the house. The sergeant, with very little pressing, betook himself to the servants' hall for refreshment. Glenlitten, loitering upon the doorstep, found himself back in time to say good-bye to the two men from the barracks and their guest. The latter expressed his regret with grave but courteous emphasis.

"I cannot tell you, Lord Glenlitten," he said, "how much I sympathise with you and your wife. It is terrible to have had such a tragedy happen in one's house, and it is more terrible still that it should have taken place actually in your wife's presence. When you come to London, I hope that you will permit me to call and assure myself that she has not suffered."

"Pleased to see you at any time," Glenlitten replied politely but without marked enthusiasm. "I'll let you fellows know when we shoot," he added, turning to Fraser. "There's always room for a couple of you, especially if you don't mind a walk."

"Very kind of you."

"Very good of you indeed."

The car drove off. Glenlitten and Sir Richard turned into the library, and the former asked the question which had been troubling him for the last ten minutes.

"Tell me, old chap," he begged, looking suddenly

across at his companion, with his hand upon the whisky decanter, "why did you discourage the sergeant from sending to Scotland Yard? You could see for yourself as well as I could the sort of ass the fellow is."

Sir Richard said nothing for a moment. He was standing upon the hearthrug, with his hands behind his back, his long, lean body a little bent, his thin brows furrowed with thought.

"I had an idea that I'd like to think the matter over a little myself first, Andrew," he confided at last.

"But why?" his host persisted. "What is there to think about? The whole thing seems to me as plain as a pikestaff."

Sir Richard helped himself to a very modest drink.

"There's no doubt whatever," he confessed, "that the possession of a mind trained in the subtleties of the law is inclined to make one a little, shall we say, finicky. The murder of that poor fellow De Besset, and the theft of your wife's jewels, certainly seems, on the face of it, a very simple and a very brutal affair, and yet before I make up my mind I should like another half an hour in your wife's room, and, if she is well enough, just one word with her."

"You're not suggesting—"

"My dear fellow," the lawyer interrupted, laying his hand affectionately upon his friend's shoulder, "I'm suggesting nothing. It's just as I told you—my peculiar turn of mind. There are one or two little

matters I should like to understand, and a few hours' delay will do no harm. Of course every one must realise that the burglary was a clumsy piece of work. The fellow who would rely upon a ladder which he found upon the premises, leave a car in a patch of mud, wear ordinary boots, and drop a cigarette out of his case, is certainly not in the first flight. We can afford to give him a few hours' start, believe me. I shouldn't wonder," Sir Richard concluded, sipping his whisky and soda, "I shouldn't be greatly surprised even if our friend the sergeant didn't bring this little affair off himself. Let's give him the chance, Andrew. Think what it will mean to him. Promotion, and something to talk about for the rest of his life."

Glenlitten's fingers shook a little as he replenished his glass, drained it, and set it down empty.

"What about turning in?" he suggested.

The lawyer glanced at the clock and nodded.

"You won't mind if I just finish that article in the *Times*," he begged. "I'll follow you in a quarter of an hour. You needn't bother about the lights. I have my torch."

He stretched out his hand for the *Times* and relapsed into an easy-chair. Glenlitten lingered for a moment.

"Nothing more to say to me, have you?" he asked abruptly.

The lawyer looked over the top of his paper, with a faint air of surprise.

"Why, no, Andrew," he replied. "What should I have to say to you? We'll have a talk to-morrow, if there's anything to talk about."

Glenlitten swung around and presently disappeared in the shadows of the great house, dimly lit here and there with lamps and candles. Sir Richard laid down the *Times* and listened for his host's departing footsteps.

CHAPTER V

The Ford car, as it turned out to be, notwithstanding assiduous efforts on the part of the sergeant and his *confrères* from Winchester, was not traced farther than the left-hand turn from the village of Charlton. The police beyond, freely communicated with, were unable to afford any information. Clumsy at his job though Sir Richard had pronounced him, the burglar still had wit enough to evade arrest. The day arrived when the coroner's inquest could be postponed no longer, and then, for the first time, Félice told her story. Very small and frail she looked, almost like an exquisite doll, as, tenderly escorted by her husband, she was given a chair in the witness box and received the friendly and respectful greetings of the coroner. She answered the questions put to her with very little hesitation, although she spoke very slowly and occasionally relapsed into a word or two of French. It was obvious, too, that she was somewhat troubled by the formal nature of the questions. Why should it be necessary to tell them all—many who lived in the same village—her name and who she was? Then, as well, there was another man who troubled her, the small, unassuming man seated at the back of the Court who, it was whispered, had just arrived from Scotland Yard. He took many notes, and she found his eyes often resting upon her. Once she turned her chair a little away. The man was like a menace to her.

"Yes, indeed," she acknowledged, "that is my name—Félice Vera, Marchioness of Glenlitten. . . . Yes, it is true that I have been married less than a year. Upon that Wednesday evening—you must not ask me dates, for I never remember them—I retired early, as soon as Lord and Lady Manfield had left, because it had commenced to thunder, and thunder gives me always fear and a headache. My maid I knew was dancing, and I did not disturb her. I sent word that she need not attend. I undressed myself. I took a bath, I spent a few minutes in my boudoir looking through some books, wondering whether I would take one to read, and also there were one or two letters for me. Then I reëntered my bedroom. The window was just a little open and placed on the catch, as I always like it. The only light in my bedroom was by the side of the bed. I heard no sound except the music downstairs. I am quite content—a little sleepy. I get into bed. Then I turn out the light. Perhaps I sleep. I do not know that. Perhaps it was a doze. Then I hear a creaking at the window which seemed strange. And I open my eyes. The window, which was only two inches open, is wide open. Something is there, blocking out the moonlight. I look again. It is a man with something black on his face—you call it a mask, yes?—and his hands were stealing out towards the jewels which I had left on my dressing table. I think his knee was upon the window sill, but of that I cannot be certain. I tried to put out my hand to the light, but I could not

move. I am a great coward, and I was all fear. I fancied that I heard the opening of my boudoir door, a voice calling out. That must have been the voice, they tell me, of the Comte de Besset. That I did not know. It gave me courage. I stretched out my hand to the light. I touch the switch—and nothing happens. Then, suddenly, I know that the lights go out from everywhere—the reflection, the light from my husband's room which shines under the door. Afterwards one knew that the cable had been cut. The darkness now in the room was terrible. I fall back on the pillow. I can do nothing. I try not to shriek. I do not hear the opening of my door, but in a moment, though my eyes were half closed, though I was shivering with fear, there seemed to be a flash of light in the room and the report of a pistol."

"In what part of the room did you see the flash?" the coroner asked.

Félice was brought to a sudden pause. She held out her hand to her husband's which rested upon the side of her chair. With the other she raised a dainty little porcelain gold-topped bottle and sniffed it. Presently she continued.

"From where I do not know. There is a flash of light. It seems to split up the room, and a report—not very loud—rather like a whistle. Then I hear a man groan and the sound of some one falling. Nothing more from the window have I seen. In the darkness, the man who had leaned there was invisible. I hear nothing, nothing, nothing more, but there are

sounds in my head and in my ears. When I open my eyes my husband is there, and after that the Doctor Meadows, who was visiting.

"No, I saw no human being ever in the room. When I entered from the bathroom it was peacefully, beautifully silent. Never did I see the Comte de Besset. Never did I see more than the black mask and outstretched hand of the man who entered through the window. Then, as I have told you, all the lights they go, and as the moon had not risen behind the back of the Home Wood, and my room was in the shadows, I see nothing, nothing more."

The coroner fidgeted with his papers a little and leaned forward encouragingly.

"Your story is quite comprehensible, Marchioness," he said kindly. "In fact, under the circumstances, it is very clear. The questions for consideration then, are these, although you have indeed already answered them. We are to take it that you saw no human being in the room, that you are not able to tell from what direction the pistol was fired, that you are in no way able to help us as regards the position of the murderer of this man Raoul de Besset?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Indeed, Monsieur," she replied, "would I be happy if I could bring light. The Comte de Besset was a friend of mine. He was the owner of all the estates where I was brought up in France, and the nearest neighbour of my guardian. He was enter-

tained at Glenlitten for my sake. He came, as they tell me, and as I would believe, to my rescue, seeing or hearing of the burglar who had arrived. And for that he is dead. Indeed, if I could help, if there was anything that I knew I would gladly tell it to you, but there is nothing. And I am very tired."

"We have no more questions to ask you, Marchioness," the coroner assured her. "The Court is very much obliged indeed for the clear way in which you have told us the little you know of this terrible happening."

Félice had already risen to her feet when a juryman stood up in the box.

"I should like to ask, sir," he ventured, "whether her ladyship does not usually lock the door of her boudoir when she retires for the night?"

"Indeed, yes," Félice assented. "Always it is kept locked. One may not tell who passes."

"But on this particular night," the man persisted, "it was unlocked."

"Naturally," she replied, "or the Comte de Besset could not have entered."

The juryman coughed a little dubiously.

"If it is usually locked," he persisted, "how did it happen to be unlocked on this particular night?"

"I have already explained," Félice said, "that I had dispensed with the services of my maid. It is my maid who locks the doors. Myself, I think of such things never. Therefore it was a chance which, alas, I now very much regret."

Still the obstinate juryman remained upon his feet.

"The principal entrance to your ladyship's apartment is from the main corridor?" he suggested.

"Naturally."

"Why shouldn't the Comte de Besset have entered by that means? Would not that have been the natural way for him to have come?"

Félice looked appealingly at the coroner. Why was this clumsy man permitted to worry her?

"The door of my boudoir," she explained, "is very much nearer the apartments given to the men visitors, and the one which the Comte de Besset occupied. Monsieur le Comte, he perhaps came the nearer way because he had seen the man climb the ladder."

The juryman sat down. The man from nobody knew where, seated at the back of the Court, made no notes, but stroked his chin thoughtfully. The coroner talked earnestly to his jury and received the expected verdict with a little bow of approbation:

"Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Back at Glenlitten, Sir Richard was the only remaining guest. After luncheon he took a cap and stick and went for a walk through the woods, up to the bare hills upon the southern side of the estate. When he returned he joined his host and hostess at the tea table in the hall.

"It's been awfully good of you to stay on," the former acknowledged warmly. "That inquest was a terrible ordeal for Félice, and I know she felt better for having you here, didn't you, dear?"

Félice looked across the tea table. She smiled into the kindly face of her guest, although there was something a little strained in those great, lustrous eyes.

"It was very kind of Sir Richard," she agreed. "I was afraid that they might be angry with me and think me very foolish because I could tell them so little. It was all like a dream—a terrible, terrible dream. You will come again soon, perhaps, Sir Richard?"

"I will come again as soon as I can," he promised, after a momentary hesitation. "There is one contingency which would certainly bring me here—to look after you both, to try my best to be a friend to you, Marchioness."

"*Quelle mystère!*" Félice laughed softly. "You will not tell me what that contingency must be, *cher* Sir Richard?"

"I shall come again," he confided, "if they should arrest the man who climbed through the window to your room—who stole your jewels."

"And why?" she asked. "Why?"

He tapped a cigarette upon the table and lit it.

"All that could be known of this terrible affair, dear wife of my friend," he said, "notwithstanding

your very clear evidence this morning at the coroner's inquest, is not yet known."

"*Par exemple?*"

He shook his head.

"In this world," he told her, "speech is perhaps one of the most dangerous and poisonous things with which we have to contend. One talks too much all the time. One speaks when silence is often better, but, nevertheless, if the time should come when the man who climbed his ladder to your room and stole your jewels should be found and put on his trial for murder, then I may again seek your hospitality."

"But I must ask you again why?" she persisted.

He flicked the ash from his cigarette. There was nothing menacing about his tone. His expression was sincere and entirely kindly.

"A few questions—a word here or there. As things are, let me offer you, dear people, the advice at which I have hinted. It is a mistake to know too much, to surmise too much, to speak too much. I myself could have given evidence this afternoon which would have disturbed our friend the coroner, which would have set my friend in the corner thinking, and which would certainly have upset the jurymen. . . . It was a very just verdict—and my car, I see, waits."

Félice gave both her hands to her departing visitor. The expression in her eyes was very wonderful,

but behind it all there was the reflection of some hidden fear lurking in her heart. His host walked with him to the front door.

"I say, old chap," he remonstrated, "aren't you being a little mysterious?"

"I hope not," Sir Richard answered thoughtfully. "I don't mean to be. On the other hand there are certain things I don't want to say outright. You see, I have been in rather a difficult position down here. I am a criminal lawyer, often employed by the Government, and I believe I can truthfully say that I have all the instincts of the born detective. There are things which have occurred to me, little matters which have come under my notice in connection with De Besset's death, which, in the interests of the law, I am half inclined to think should be investigated. But then I am a man as well as a lawyer. Perhaps in the interests of justice they should remain unknown. We cannot really tell. All that we do know is that De Besset had the reputation of shooting like a madman, and we were all terrified at the idea of being placed next to him; he smoked French cigarettes with your '70 port, poured your fine champagne into his coffee, and looked often at your wife with the expression in his eyes which men of the Latin countries seem to have cultivated and which always makes an Anglo-Saxon want to knock them down. Apart from all these minor sins, neither I nor any one else liked him. Therefore, perhaps all is for the best. If you need me at any time, Andrew,

you know where to find me. Look me up anyhow if you come to town."

The car drove off, and Glenlitten remained upon the broad, curved steps, the affable, farewell-bidding host.

"If I need him?" he repeated to himself, as he made his way back to the hall. "The fellow's got a bee in his bonnet."

Félice and her husband wandered on to the terrace after they had lighted their cigarettes, crossed the avenue, and passed into the wood. Andrew sent back for a gun and tried to stalk a rabbit. Félice walked by his side in rapt and dreamy silence. Somewhere in a corner of the walled kitchen garden a huge bonfire had been started, and the aromatic perfume of burning wood and weeds floated to their nostrils with the falling dusk—a perfume somehow reminiscent of the change of seasons, the first reminder of the coming winter. Up in the trees an owl hooted, late homecoming pigeons—more exciting than rabbits—came drifting past, too high, alas, for a shot.

"It is very peaceful here," Félice murmured, with a little tug at her husband's arm. "I love your beautiful home, Andrew. Sometimes I wonder what I have done to deserve such happiness."

He stooped down and kissed her. A rabbit lopped across the path without undue haste.

"Are you really happy then?" he whispered. "You do not regret France?"

"Never," she answered passionately. "This is the life I adore, and you are the man."

"I am ten years older than you," he reminded her, a little sadly, as they turned up one of the side avenues which led homeward.

"In knowledge and wisdom, and all the dear things of life," she agreed. "Otherwise, no. There we are both the same, Andrew. I have twenty years, and you thirty, but you have the great strength. You see with large eyes. You have those noble things in your heart. I sometimes fear that I am weak, that I am not worthy—now more than ever I am afraid."

"Why now more than ever?" he asked.

They walked on in silence. The dry twigs broke under their feet, rabbits scurried to and fro in the bracken, unheeded. A grey owl floated over their heads with a melancholy cry, pigeons swooped down within easy gun-fire, unnoticed.

"Because you see," she explained, "I feel that I am the cause of so much trouble in your great home. It is for my sake you asked Raoul de Besset here—and your jewels—your beautiful diamond necklace, which so many of your womenkind have worn—it is through my carelessness that it is lost."

He slipped the cartridges from his gun, stooped down, and gathered her into his arms.

"My little sweetheart," he exclaimed, "all the jewels of Glenlitten are yours for the losing or keeping! All that I need in life is your heart."

"You will always feel like that?" she begged, with a sudden passionate choke in her voice.

"Always," he promised.

A wild strength seemed suddenly to possess her arms. She drew his face down to hers. Her eyes were ablaze.

"And I have always hated Englishmen!" she cried. "I thought them jealous and suspicious. This man De Besset—Raoul de Besset—he was shot in my room. The whole world knows that now. You do not care. You have asked no single question. There are things which seem to need explanation. Your friend the great lawyer, he looks at me with those kind grey eyes, and he leaves because he has thoughts there, there, there," she went on, tapping her forehead, "which for your sake he will keep secret, but you—you smile like a prince. You ask nothing."

He laughed happily—a soft, strangely sweet laugh for a man of his strength and physique.

"Félice," he whispered, "you are my life, my happiness. When I doubt you, the blood will turn sour in my veins, and life itself will pass. But that day will not come."

Again the owl floated over their heads, and this time Félice drew away with a little shiver.

"Shoot it," she cried, almost fiercely.

To humour her he would have slipped the cartridges back into his gun, but she stopped him.

"Ah, no," she sighed, "I did not mean that. At

night I love to hear them. It was only that night—one cried just when the horror came. But I love them, dear Andrew. Sometimes I have felt a little lonely in your great house, those rooms are so huge and you are so far away. Then their call has been a comfort to me."

He stooped and whispered in her ear as they passed from the wood out into the avenue.

"You have been rash," he warned her. "Now you shall be less lonely."

CHAPTER VI

A RUMOUR was somehow started in the county that my lord and Lady Glenlitten were moping because of the recent tragedy in their household, and, as though with common accord, every one descended upon them. Lady Susan, who lived in sedate widowhood, barely a score of miles away, turned up early upon a brilliant Saturday morning, with half a dozen young people, and after luncheon there were three or four tennis courts going, besides a little stream of visitors playing golf upon the private course in the park. The clouds seemed to have passed. The recent tragedy was forgotten. Félice was the most delightful of hostesses—at one moment a child, laughing and romping with the youngest, at another the smiling and gracious chatelaine of a great house. She played tennis—considering her small reach—with wonderful skill, and she was indefatigable. She was the blue butterfly of happiness, and sometimes she found it hard to escape from her youthful admirers. Towards the close of the afternoon, she and her husband settled down for a serious set, which they won with ease. She took one of her defeated opponents—Rodney Haslam—by the arm, and led him away.

"You would like a whisky and soda," she asked, as they reached the shade of a cedar tree, "or to talk with me?"

"I should like very much," he told her, "to combine the two."

He gave her some cup to which she pointed, and they sank into low chairs.

"Now we are very comfortable," she said, "and I feel that I must ask you a question which so many times has been in my mind. You permit?"

"Why, of course," he answered. "Ask me anything you like."

"I wish to know why you are so mysterious about this great tragedy which has made us all so sad?"

"Am I?" he answered, a little taken aback.

"I find you so," she assured him. "It seems very stupid—perhaps I am wrong—but we will make an understanding about it. If ever the slightest reference is made to that terrible night, wherever we are, you look across at me almost—it sounds silly, but it is true—almost as though we had a secret in common."

He was frankly startled.

"I can promise you," he began—

She waved his protest away.

"This is a matter upon which I feel too deeply to fancy things. You have always the air of saying to yourself, 'There is something I could tell if I would, and you know it too, you, Félice.' And then you look across at me, and that light, that sombre light, is always burning in your eyes for people to see and wonder at."

He lit a cigarette. His long bony fingers shook a little as he blew out the match.

"You wish for frankness, Lady Glenlitten?"

"But yes," she answered, frowning at him impatiently. "Why not? We have no secret together, you and I, yet from the way you look at me one would sometimes imagine that we had. I do not like it. Please speak whatever is in your mind."

He glanced around. They were alone in the deep shade of one of the old cedar trees.

"On that night," he confided, "I saw De Besset slip away from the lounge. It was very soon after you yourself had gone upstairs. I behaved perhaps like a cad. I suppose it was a form of jealousy which seized hold of me."

"Jealousy?" she exclaimed, looking at him with wide-open eyes.

"Yes," he replied curtly. "I knew you, it seemed to me, better than De Besset. Before he came, I had the happiness to see a great deal of you at Deauville. Your husband and I were old schoolfellows. As you know, he didn't have much in common with the crowd there, and so by degrees we drifted together—we three—day by day."

"That is quite true," she admitted. "You were a very pleasant companion for Andrew, and I did like you myself."

"After De Besset appeared," Haslam continued, "everything was changed. It was he who danced with you, he whose little parties and expeditions you al-

ways joined, he whose box you accepted at the races, and on whose yacht you sailed. At first it simply meant that I was your husband's companion, whilst you and De Besset were amusing yourselves together. When I could stand it no longer, I left the place, and drifted back to my old state of loneliness."

"I am very sorry," she said, still a little perplexed. "I was just loving life so much, I accepted everything that came along, and Raoul de Besset, although he meant no more to me than you did, or any other man except my husband, made himself very agreeable. If I had known that I had hurt your feelings, I should have been very sorry. But tell me, what has all this to do with that awful night?"

"If you want the whole truth, you shall have it," Haslam went on, a grimmer note creeping into his tone. "When I saw De Besset glance around as though wondering whether any one were noticing and then leave the room, a mad thought came to me, and a mad impulse—an impulse to which I yielded. I followed him. He was quicker than I up the stairs, and disappeared, but he turned down the south corridor, and when I passed the door of your boudoir, I heard voices. You were supposed to have retired with a headache half an hour before, and Andrew was downstairs playing bridge, but I heard voices in your boudoir."

She turned and looked at him, frankly astonished and yet with some trace of that haunted look in her

eyes which for a moment had crept into them during the inquest.

"Voices in my room?" she repeated. "But that is impossible. You imagined it."

"It has been the curse of my life," he told her, "that I have too little imagination. I never believed that I had any at all until I met you, but I heard the voices in your boudoir as surely as we hear the birds singing to us at this moment, and I think that if at that moment the door had opened and De Besset had come out—he might have been alive to-day —in the hospital perhaps, but alive."

Félice sat very still, and the man by her side had just tact enough not to break the silence she imposed. To all appearance she was watching the nearest of the tennis sets.

"So you spied upon my doings from the corridor —you, a guest in my husband's house," she said softly, without looking at him, almost as though speaking to herself.

"I followed De Besset," he explained, a little sullenly. "I had grown to hate the fellow, with his affectations and vanities and damned conceits. If I had stayed downstairs and not known where he was, I should have gone crazy. I had to come."

"Did your imagination lead you further still?" she asked. "Did you fancy that you did hear what passed between the two people who were not there?"

"No," he admitted. "There were servants passing in the main corridor. I couldn't remain like an eaves-

dropper outside your door. I heard the voices—you were speaking in French—that was enough for me, and I passed on to my own room."

"And then?"

"I pulled myself together," he answered, "as we all have to. I filled my case with the cigarettes I tried to persuade myself that I had come to fetch, and I went downstairs again."

"Passing my door?"

"Yes."

"You fancied still, perhaps, that you heard voices?"

"I did not listen," he admitted. "I could not, for exactly opposite there was a servant entering some one's room. But I heard the sound of movements. You were still there."

She stretched out her hand for her glass and drank slowly most of its contents. Then she turned in her chair and looked deliberately up at her companion. Life had made a hard man of Rodney Haslam, and the battle marks were in his face. The lines about his mouth were pitiless, his blue-grey eyes held little of softness. Upon the side of his forehead was a deep scar, spoiling what would have been a good outline, a scar, some one had once told her, made by the claw of a lioness when he had rushed out of the compound in his pyjamas, with only a light-calibred revolver, to save the life of a native child. Somehow or other the sight of that wound soothed her.

"Well," she said, "now that you have told me the truth, I know what you are thinking when they talk of that night. Do you not wish, perhaps, to tell this story to my husband, to those others who believe that De Besset saw the burglar and ran in to warn me? Or what is it you wish? To make a bargain with me for your silence?"

He turned his head, and for a moment she was ashamed. She laid her hand upon his wrist. Tears suddenly dimmed her eyes.

"I am *imbécile!*" she exclaimed. "I am a little beast! Forgive—please forgive."

A manservant, who had been crossing the lawn, made his respectful approach.

"You are asked for upon the telephone, my lady," he announced. "It is a call from London."

Félice sprang to her feet. She looked up at Haslam almost piteously. She was like a child shrinking from pain.

"You forgive?" she repeated.

"I forgive," he assured her.

She crossed the lawn with flying footsteps.

She found her husband by her side as she hung up the receiver. He looked at her a little anxiously.

"Tired, dear?"

"Perhaps a little," she admitted. "Did you hear with whom I spoke?"

"I tried to play the eavesdropper, but I failed,"

he confessed, laughing. "I arrived just a second too late. One of your young admirers, I imagine, who can't get over this afternoon."

She clung tightly to his arm.

"Why do all these big schoolboys," she demanded, "like me so much, and a great man like you—though he is my husband—he does not care at all?"

He passed his arm around her waist and kissed her. She closed her eyes and nestled against him for a moment or two.

"Now that you have been sweet, I will tell you who it was who telephoned," she confided. "It was the stern, cruel man who gets people hung."

"Dick Cotton, by Jove!" Andrew exclaimed. "What on earth did he want?"

"He proposed himself to spend the week-end with us. He is on his way down. I told him, of course, that we would be very glad. He will be here in time for dinner."

"Capital! I am always glad to see old Cotton. And don't you make any mistake about him, sweetheart. A stern fellow he seems to most people, but he's really one of the kindest-hearted men in the world."

Félice shivered a little.

"I wish he did not frighten me so," she sighed. "It is his eyes which seem to be always following one about and asking cruel questions."

They stepped outside, and she flung herself into the outstretched arms of a new arrival—a pleasant-

faced beflanneled youth, a nephew of the house.

"No more serious talk," she cried. "We will play tennis together—you and I, Billy, against the world —and afterwards rounders. Andrew, you must tell them about preparing Sir Richard's room. I am a child again and I am going to play."

They all gathered round her and rushed off to an unoccupied court. Haslam, who had made his unobtrusive appearance, stood by his host's side. They both watched her with varying expressions. The longer they looked, the more masklike became Haslam's face. Presently he turned to his host.

"Andrew," he said, "I am very sorry, but I have just received an urgent message from town. I must leave within a quarter of an hour. I have taken the liberty of ordering my car, and the man who looks after me is packing my clothes."

"My dear fellow!" Andrew protested. "I am terribly sorry. Sure you can't hang on until tomorrow?"

"Quite impossible."

"Well, I'll call Félice—"

"Please don't. Make my excuses to her, won't you? We have had a little conversation already, and I hinted that I might be called away. It's my Chief who needs me. There are a lot of changes being made, and two new posts to be granted. I can't afford to be away for a moment."

"Well, of course one must not say a word, if that's the case," Andrew observed, turning towards the

house with his guest. "We'll be awfully sorry to lose you, all the same. Come down again—any time—so long as you're sure we're here. I may bring Félice up to town for a day or so before we start the pheasants. She's like most young women of a volatile temperament who have had to face a shock—the better for continual change afterwards. Here are your things coming out already, I see."

Haslam paused on the edge of the lawn and held out his hand.

"Don't come any farther, please," he begged his host. "They want you for tennis. I've had a ripping two days, anyway, and if I hear you're in town, I'll ring up."

"The twelfth for the pheasants, remember, unless you'd like the second go at the big wood," his friend reminded him, as they shook hands.

"I'll make a note of the twelfth," Haslam promised. "I'll come unless I'm packed off."

He hurried away, and Andrew Glenlitten retraced his steps in leisurely fashion. Upon the border of the higher lawn, he paused. Before him was the wing of the great edifice in which the tragedy had taken place. He stood with his hands behind his back, looking up at the row of windows, counting them until he arrived at Félice's. At them he gazed long and earnestly. He saw where the ladder had been. He pictured to himself the dark form slipping rapidly up the rungs, unfastening the catch holding the window which led into the room. He looked farther along the

line towards De Besset's quarters. It was so natural what had happened—De Besset, leaning out for a breath of fresh air and seeing the intruder. A terrible tragedy, but a very simple one. The period of acute shock of course now had passed, and the reconstructing mind moved more easily. He could see De Besset obeying a chivalrous enough instinct, not pausing to give the alarm, but hurrying along the corridor, bursting into the threatened room, to find himself face to face with a desperate man collecting his spoils. Horrible to be shot down unarmed, without a moment's warning, or a chance at self-defence. There was only one thought which sometimes filled him with a vague unease—an unease which he recognised owed its reawakening in those few minutes to the thought of Cotton's unexpected visit. The great lawyer's attitude about the whole thing had been a little strange. Always his manner had seemed to conceal some hidden thought. The legal mind refusing to accept the obvious, he decided, as he turned away.

He met a scattered little group coming towards him. Félice now was being gravely polite to some older callers. The chill of the autumn evening, after the long Indian summer's day, was calling them all indoors.

CHAPTER VII

THERE were times when, after the second glass of vintage port, a slight tinge of colour showed itself in Sir Richard's parchment-like skin, and his eyes lost something of their accustomed steely glow. That night, however, after the departure of Félice, nothing of the sort happened. He sat playing with the stem of his glass, gazing moodily at the polished mahogany beneath. His host passed the decanter with a little wave and held it invitingly forward.

"Nearly the last of my Cockburn '70, Dick," he confided.

"A wonderful wine!" the other murmured, as he suffered his glass to be refilled.

"And now tell me," Andrew asked him, "why all these questions about Félice?"

"You promised before dinner to tell me the story of your marriage, that is all. I should like to hear it. I suppose I am curious, like the rest of the world."

Andrew refilled his own glass with steady hand.

"There is no reason why the whole world should not know every little detail of it," he said, "except that I think both Félice and I are shy of talking about what might be counted a romance. This is just what happened, though. I was motoring through the Dauphiné country on my way to Grenoble when, just as I was nearing a small village—well, never mind the name—an old-fashioned carriage turned out of the gates of a tumble-down château, and crash I

went into it. It was a perfectly absurd equipage. The coachman appears to have been deaf and half blind, and nearly eighty years of age; the gate itself was concealed, and he came out at a trot. It was a narrow road, and nothing that I could have done would have averted an accident. Of the two passengers in the carriage, one was a Madame de Sandillac, the other was Félice. Madame de Sandillac was killed outright; Félice I had to take to a hospital."

"I remember reading something about your having been in a motor accident," Sir Richard remarked thoughtfully. "I had no idea, though, it was so serious."

"They'd have put me in prison all right, without a doubt," Andrew continued, "but for the fact that there were half a dozen witnesses who were able to swear that the carriage came out on to the high road at an unreasonable pace, and the whole district, including the local magistrate, seemed to know that the coachman was stone deaf. I got off lightly enough, but Félice was in the hospital a month. As soon as she recovered, I married her."

"Not, I imagine, wholly out of a sense of responsibility," Cotton observed, with a smile which was almost human.

"Not in the least," was the frank acknowledgment. "I married her simply because I fell in love with her the moment I picked her up. I have remained in love with her ever since, and I always shall be in love with her. The one sentimental episode of

my life, Dick. Knowing the sort of man I am, you can imagine it doesn't amuse me to talk about it very much. Think of the slosh they put in the papers nowadays!"

Sir Richard nodded sympathetically.

"And now—who was Madame de Sandillac?"

"An elderly lady of decayed fortune," Glenlitten replied, "highly respectable and respected. Incidentally, she was almost as old as her coachman, and very feeble."

"And what relationship was there between her and your wife?"

Glenlitten sipped his wine meditatively.

"None at all."

"Just a ward?"

"Something of the sort," Glenlitten replied. "She appears to have lived with the old lady since she was four or five years old. Some one brought her from Russia at the very commencement of the trouble there. Madame de Sandillac had at one time been French governess to a branch of the family and had continued friendly relations with some of them ever since."

"And her own people?" Sir Richard queried.

"I really don't think she remembers much about them, and she certainly has at times shown a curious aversion to talking about them. I have always humoured her willingly. I daresay you can understand," Glenlitten went on, after a moment's pause, "that although no one in the world could call me a

snob or anything of that sort, I am not altogether anxious to have a crowd of relatives-in-law of whom I know nothing. I am satisfied with Félice, and she is happy and satisfied with me. I did gather once, in an earlier conversation, that her people were very poor and were continually obtaining, or trying to obtain, money deposited with Madame de Sandillac on Félice's behalf. Since they found that useless, or perhaps got all the money, they have taken very little further notice of her. She seems to prefer not to talk about them. I have grown into the same habitude."

"This Madame de Sandillac, was she by any chance wealthy?" Sir Richard asked.

"If she was," Glenlitten told him with a smile, "she had a whole crowd of nephews and nieces, who descended like a nest of hornets upon the place on the day of her funeral. There was certainly nothing left for Félice. As a matter of fact, I doubt whether in France it isn't rather difficult to leave anything to a foreigner when you have a crowd of relatives."

Sir Richard nodded.

"I believe that is so," he agreed. "So that is the story of your marriage, which has puzzled all London!"

"That is the story," Glenlitten assented, a little stiffly, "and you are about the only man to whom I could tell it. If it got about, the first thing that would happen would be a picture of my wife in one

of these confounded society papers, with a little digest of the story underneath. Keep a still tongue in your head about it, Dick, there's a good fellow."

"Oh, I'm not a gossip. Still, Andrew, for a man in your position—and after all, even in these days that has to count for something—weren't you taking rather a risk in marrying a young girl—I had almost said a child—of whose people you knew nothing whatever?"

Andrew Glenlitten snapped his fingers.

"I care exactly that," he said, "for any relations my wife may have, however disreputable they may be. The only thing I regret is the difference in our ages, and she is teaching me all the time to forget that. She has given me happiness such as few men could even understand. She has never occasioned me a moment's anxiety."

"I have certainly never seen you look so well and contented in your life," Sir Richard admitted.

"She is, perhaps, from some points of view, a little childish," Glenlitten went on, "but to me her childishness, which is perfectly natural, is one of the sweetest things on earth. Now let's drop the subject, or I shall begin to make an ass of myself. Supposing you tell me, Dick, what made you decide you wanted to come down and spend a week-end with us. We are delighted to see you, of course, but you are always such a difficult man to stir, and I am relying upon you for later on."

Sir Richard looked at his host. The long, bony

fingers of his left hand were tapping the lace doily by his side.

"You haven't heard, then?"

"Heard what? For heaven's sake, don't be mysterious."

"Your burglar was arrested last night at Harwich, just as he was boarding the steamer for Holland. They're bringing him back to London to-day. It will be in to-morrow morning's papers."

"Damned good news!" Andrew declared with enthusiasm. "I haven't said much about it for fear of worrying Félice, but one doesn't exactly like a necklace worth thirty thousand pounds to slip out of the family."

"This burglar," Sir Richard continued, looking hard into his glass, "will also be charged with the murder of the Comte de Besset."

"Why not? You aren't turning sentimentalist, are you, Dick? He killed him, all right."

"Did he?" was the calm rejoinder. "I am not sure that I agree with you."

There was a moment's silence. Andrew Glenlitten, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, leaned back in his chair, looking incredulously at his guest.

"If the burglar didn't kill him, who did?" he demanded.

"I don't know," Sir Richard answered. "You, perhaps."

Andrew laughed scornfully.

"Don't be an ass!" he enjoined. "You know perfectly well that I was downstairs playing bridge. You took my place. Besides, why should I want to kill poor De Besset?"

"I don't know," the lawyer acknowledged. "I don't know why any one should have wanted to kill De Besset. On the face of it, the only person who had any motive in doing so was the burglar, but if for a moment you accept the theory that the burglar did not kill him, then you have to admit that there must have been a third man in the room, of whom up to the present nothing has been said."

"A third man?" Andrew repeated in blank amazement. "How on earth could there have been a third man in Félice's room?"

"There may have been a third man after the jewels," Sir Richard suggested tonelessly.

Glenlitten took his hands out of his pockets.

"Dick," he said, "for a clever chap, it seems to me that you are talking like an ass. How could a third man have been hidden in the room? How could he have got there? What evidence is there concerning him? Why, Félice undressed there. Where was he hiding?"

"Quite so," Sir Richard agreed. "There are many problems to be faced, of course, but since the present position has arisen, Andrew, I am going to tell you that I noticed several things about the room that night which for the moment I am going to keep to myself."

Andrew Glenlitten was very quiet now, but it was the quietude of suppressed passion. Sir Richard Cotton was his oldest friend, but if he had obeyed the furious instinct which had surged into his heart, he would have leaned over and struck him across the mouth. His voice, when he spoke, was curiously unlike himself. It seemed to come from a long way off, unrecognisable to his own listening ears.

"And what do you deduce from these—observations of yours?"

"Please bear with me, Andrew," his friend begged gently. "Mind, I am not suggesting for a single moment that your wife knew of any other person being in the room. It was quite possible for any one, knowing that she was in the habit of leaving a thirty-thousand-pound necklace on the dressing table to hide there without her knowledge, and yet—I am bound to tell you this—I think that your wife knows a little more than she has told us, and under those circumstances—the circumstances being that very soon a man will be upon his trial for murder—it becomes necessary that she should be quite frank at any cost, that she should tell us everything she knows, anything she may suspect."

Andrew finished his port, stretched out his hand, lit a cigarette and pushed the box across. With the handkerchief which he drew almost surreptitiously from his coat pocket, he wiped the beads of moisture from his forehead.

"For a clever man, Dick," he declared, with an

attempt at lightness, "I never heard such tosh in my life as you've been talking."

"But is it tosh?" was the swift protest. "I'm a criminal lawyer, mind, Andrew, and I see these things from the legal point of view. Why did your wife, who passionately adores dancing and who had been in the highest spirits all day, desert her guests under pretext of a headache? Why was her own main door into the corridor, and the door communicating with your apartment locked, and the more important door into her boudoir left open, as it must have been for De Besset to have rushed in that way. Was it only a coincidence that she chose that one particular evening—the evening she had a headache and might have needed attention—to send her maid away and refuse to allow her to perform the usual offices? No one respects and admires Lady Glenlitten more than I do. She is your wife, to start with, which makes her dear to me, and no one could meet her day by day without beginning to feel affection for her; but in this case I am the law, and the life of a burglar is the same thing to me as the life of a prince. When he is brought up for his trial, there must be no question of shielding anybody else. You must make her understand that. What she suspects, she must confide to us."

Andrew rose to his feet a little unsteadily, although with a great effort to appear at his ease.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I entirely agree with you, except that I am perfectly certain Félice neither

knows nor suspects any more than she has told us. However, we must respect the attitude of the law, though it all sounds a little crude and quaint, coming from the lips of a pal. We'll have it out with Félice."

The two men strolled together across the hall, loitered for a moment to warm their hands at the great log fire in the open hearth, and tried their best to behave naturally as host and guest. Parkins came respectfully across towards them.

"Her ladyship is in the smaller library, my lord," he announced. "I am sending coffee there."

Glenlitten nodded and piloted his guest across the smoothly polished floor to a very comfortable apartment with old-fashioned oak furniture, upholstered in faded but magnificent red damask. Félice was curled up upon an immense divan, drawn close to the fire. She threw down her book at their entrance and leaned eagerly forward.

"You have been a very long time," she complained. "I should like to know at once all that you and Sir Richard have been talking about."

There was something a little breathless about the question. Sir Richard waved it on one side.

"Like all old fogeys who enjoy their glass of port," he said, "I love my coffee and cigarette afterwards, and behold!"

Parkins and a footman were arranging the coffee and *liqueurs* upon a round table in the middle of the room.

"You'll take just a sniff at the old brandy, Dick," his host urged. "I'm afraid we won't have many more chances. The worst of having a long minority and a Bishop for a guardian is that your cellars get neglected. No one had better guardians," he continued, as he crossed the room with his own coffee and took a seat by his wife's side, "than I had, from a financial point of view, but they hadn't the faintest idea of laying down wines."

Sir Richard established himself comfortably in a high-backed chair close at hand. The servants left the room.

"And now, please," Félice begged, "you are both of you—you especially, Andrew—shocking actors. Something has happened. You are both on edge with one another, and you've been sitting at the table there for half an hour. Tell me at once what it means."

"Just this," her husband replied, carefully lighting his cigar. "Dick was telling me some news. Your burglar has been caught."

There was a moment's silence. Sir Richard bent over the cigar box. He never even glanced towards Félice. Andrew turned away to reach for his brandy.

"And the necklace?" she asked.

"There is no news of that for the moment," Sir Richard admitted, "but the fact that he was arrested at Harwich leads one to suppose that he may have had the diamonds upon him. He was probably on his way over to Amsterdam."

Félice nodded thoughtfully. She showed very few signs of discomposure. Sir Richard watched the cigar smoke drift upwards towards the ceiling. He was wondering whether she was really the delightfully natural child she seemed, or whether this was the guile of her sex. He tried to remember what he had heard about the Russian temperament.

"It would be a great joy to have my necklace back again," she murmured. "Will he be very much punished, Sir Richard, for stealing it?"

"Not too heavily," was the cautious reply. "Burglary without violence is, if anything, scheduled a little too leniently in the statute book. The trouble he will have to face will be more serious though, I am afraid."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There is the man—poor De Besset—" he reminded her, "who came in to warn you, and who was killed at the foot of your bed, murdered in cold blood."

She set down her cup with trembling fingers. Little by little, the delicate colour faded from her cheeks.

"But how can they prove that he did that?" she exclaimed. "There was no one who saw him."

"No one who actually saw him fire the shot, perhaps, but, on the other hand, who else in the room could have done it?"

She sat with her hands clasped and her great eyes fixed. She seemed to be looking through the wall of the room, to be envisaging the horrible memories of

that night. Andrew leaned over and took her hand in his, aghast to feel how cold it was.

"You see, Félice dearest," he said tenderly, "it is very terrible, but if a man who comes to steal kills another man without a moment's warning, and is caught, he must pay the penalty. They realise that when they start out."

"But no one saw him do it," she persisted. "If he says that he did not do it, how can they prove that he did?"

Sir Richard smiled in very melancholy fashion.

"I am afraid," he interposed, "that the presumptive evidence alone is strong enough to hang him. There is, as a matter of fact," he went on, "only one person who could save this man's life—that is to say if it ought to be saved—and that person is you."

"But what can I do?" she demanded piteously. "Am I to invent a story, to pretend that I saw something when I did not?"

"Certainly not," was the firm reply. "If you are absolutely and entirely convinced that no one else could have been in the room, that is the end of the matter."

"But," she faltered, "how could I tell? How could I know? How indeed could any one have seen anything? The lights all went out just at that moment, just before the flash of the revolver. If there was any moonlight, the burglar's body hid it. It was all darkness. There may have been another person in the room, but who could see him?"

Sir Richard studied the end of his cigar meditatively. His host remained grimly silent.

"You don't mind my asking you a few questions?" the former continued kindly. "You see, if I can get on the track of something now, it may save quite a great deal of trouble later on."

"Of course I do not mind," she answered, "but it seems so foolish to have to say to you the same thing all the time."

"Well, tell me this, then. How long had you been in bed before De Besset came in to warn you and the burglar's head appeared at the window?"

Félice reflected.

"Again I cannot be certain," she acknowledged sorrowfully. "I believe I dozed or half slept. I know I closed my eyes and I think I must have slept."

"When the communicating door opened, you probably saw De Besset?" Sir Richard suggested.

"I did not recognise him," she answered. "I saw some one."

"You could not tell, for instance, which way he was facing?"

Félice shook her head.

"Indeed I could not. I know nothing; I saw nothing."

Sir Richard sighed—the sigh of a hypocrite.

"You were quite right, Andrew," he said. "I can see that there is nothing to be hoped for from your wife. There will always remain curious features about the case, but the man must certainly hang."

"No!" she screamed. "He must not hang! Not that!"

"Why not?" Sir Richard demanded swiftly.

Félice wrung her hands.

"Because I don't believe he was guilty," she gasped.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a moment's breathless silence. For the first time an expression of something like dismay was visible in Andrew's face. Félice was shaking from head to foot. Sir Richard's expression was unchanged.

"Why not?" he asked keenly.

"Because—because the flash—that little thread of yellow light—it did not seem to come from the window at all."

"From where, then, did it come?"

She held out her arms towards her husband. He threw his cigar away, sprang to his feet, and in a moment her head was buried against his shoulder.

"I do not know," she sobbed. "Andrew, be kind to me. Do not let him ask me these questions."

He smoothed her hair tenderly and looked across at his wife's questioner with a scowl upon his face. At that moment, there was indeed something sinister about Sir Richard's tall, thin form, the head bent slightly forward, the eyes full of enquiry.

"What can she know about it more than she has said?" Glenlitten demanded harshly. "You forget, Dick, that Félice is little more than a child; the whole thing was a terrible shock. She fainted on the spot. How can she remember anything after becoming unconscious? Why, it was enough to have sent any woman crazy."

"Quite so," Sir Richard assented softly. "I quite agree. The only thing is that if she had noticed anything—and she does seem to have the dawn of an idea that the flash came from somewhere else—it might have saved a man's life."

"Oh, bunkum!" Andrew declared. "Who could tell where a flash comes from? You don't want to make Félice ill, do you? Chuck it now, like a good fellow! As to this man being hanged—well, they'll have to find the revolver and prove that it belonged to him, and all sorts of things, before that could happen."

Sir Richard sank a little deeper into his chair.

"Don't think that I am quite a brute, either of you, please," he begged, as he knocked the ash deliberately from his cigar. "I am sure you don't for a moment believe that I came down here in any suspicious or unfriendly spirit. I came down really to prepare you for the time when, unless the matter is cleared up before, Lady Glenlitten will probably have to answer all the questions I have put to her, and many others besides, from the witness box."

"What the hell do you mean?" her husband demanded.

"Why, simply this," the lawyer explained. "The burglar, or supposed burglar—Max Drayton, his name is—is certain to be defended when the trial comes on. If he hasn't any money himself, he is probably one of a gang, and these fellows all join together. As a matter of fact, a brother-in-law—I

think it is—has already approached my office to know if I would take the case."

"You mean that you would act for a scoundrel like that?" Andrew demanded angrily.

Sir Richard shook his head in protest.

"That point of view doesn't exist, Andrew," he explained. "It is the duty of every man practising in the Criminal Courts to accept any case that is offered to him which is in any way of a reasonable character. I should not accept this one until I heard Drayton's story, but if I found that in any way convincing, I should certainly do my best to help him escape from the gallows. To get him off, I shall have to prove, or at any rate make it possible or probable, that there was some one else in the room who fired that shot. That is why I have cross-questioned Lady Glenlitten so closely, in the hope, perhaps, that her subconscious mind might yield up some little memory which was lingering in the corners of her brain."

"If you are going to begin talking that tosh again," Andrew began angrily—

"It isn't tosh," Sir Richard interrupted, speaking very quietly but with a compelling firmness. "You must try and look at this matter dispassionately, Andrew. It's a man's life that's at stake, and it's for your own sake and the sake of your wife that I speak so plainly. Both her bedroom door—the one leading out on to the corridor—and the connecting door between her apartment and yours were locked.

Will not that seem a little strange to the jury, when the door leading into her boudoir and bathroom, from the corridor where the bachelor quarters are situated, from which De Besset came, was unfastened?"

Félice was sobbing now. Her head was half buried in the cushion, her eyes were covered with a few inches of cambric handkerchief.

"I don't like Sir Richard any more, Andrew," she cried. "Please tell him to go away."

"Don't be afraid, sweetheart," he whispered. "Of course, you know, Dick," he went on, turning round and facing his friend—a grim, passionate figure—"you know that I resent every word you are saying."

Sir Richard shook his head sadly.

"It is quite useless to threaten me, Andrew," he said. "I can see you itching now to take me by the throat, but you can't do it. For one thing, I am many years older than you are, and for another, every word I am saying to you is said in kindness, because it will all come up again before long in Court, and it is far better for you to be prepared. No one—least of all I, Andrew—is casting a doubt upon your wife's word. No one, I am sure, will ever dream of suggesting anything evil concerning her, but there are mysteries, you know, Andrew, and in a case like this, there must be no mysteries. I have told you before quite frankly, and I tell you the same thing now again, that I think Félice—may I call her Félice?—knows a little more about that night

than she has ever told any one yet, and just that little more of knowledge is needed to save a man's life."

"To save a man's life," Félice repeated nervously from the depths of her cushion. "It cannot be that."

"Have you a single shred of evidence," Andrew demanded, "which would render it even improbable that the bullet was fired from the window?"

Sir Richard threw the stump of his cigar away.

"Yes," he answered.

Glenlitten towered over him—a fuming, angry man. His great muscles were swelling under the sleeves of his dinner coat; he had an almost insatiable desire to take this friend whom he had loved all his life by the shoulders and shake the breath out of him.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Out with it!"

Sir Richard shook his head unmoved.

"Andrew," he begged, "do calm yourself. You have common sense. You must know that I cannot do as you ask. Such evidence as I have will be produced when the time comes. It will be used only to save a man's life."

"Save the man's life, for God's sake!" Andrew cried, "but save it without dragging Félice's name into it."

"It was not I but chance," Sir Richard pointed out, "which placed Félice in her present unfortunate situation. All that I want to impress upon you both—both of you, whom I regard as my dear

friends—is that my duty must be done. Such questions as I have asked, I have asked in all kindness. I want you to remember and believe this—you especially, Félice—the whole truth *must* be told."

He rose to his feet, after a glance at the clock.

"You will excuse me," he begged. "I have had a stuffy day and I need exercise. I am going to the billiard room to knock the balls about for a few minutes."

He left the room, throwing from the threshold one more not unkindly glance towards Félice, whose beautiful, terrified eyes followed him up to the last moment. The door closed and they heard his footsteps crossing the polished oak floor. Félice, like a frightened child, stole into her husband's arms.

"I suppose, little sweetheart," he whispered, "there is nothing you want to tell me?"

"There is nothing—nothing—which can be told," she assured him passionately.

CHAPTER IX

Mario, the manager of the Legation Club, the best known and the most select of its kind, advanced to pay his respects to one of his most distinguished clients. Andrew and Félice, having enjoyed an excellent dinner, were seated in their corner listening to the dance music.

"It is surely an unusual pleasure to see your lordship in London during September," Mario ventured.

Andrew tapped his leg.

"Put my knee out climbing a fence the other day," he explained. "No walking for at least ten days. Thought we'd like a few days up in town, now that the crowd has cleared out, and of course we had to come and look you up."

"It is most amiable," the manager murmured. "If people only understood what an attractive place London can be when the tourists have gone! But it is unfortunate about the leg. Milord is not able to dance?"

"Not for a fortnight."

Mario hesitated.

"To-night for the first time," he announced, "I have ventured upon an experiment. I am copying the Continental fashion. I have here two lady *danseuses* and two young men—*très gentils*, of good manners—as professional dancers. So, if milady would care to dance—"

Félice shook her head.

"I am becoming very old-fashioned, Mario," she confided, smiling up at him. "I like to dance only with my husband."

He held her hand under the table, but laughed at her.

"Félice, my dear," he expostulated, "don't be silly! You know how you love it, and Ambrose is playing divinely to-night. Trot out your best young man, Mario. Her ladyship will dance with him."

"With great pleasure," was the gratified reply. "It will help me very much, because if people see that her ladyship accepts the fashion, others will follow. I can assure you that the young man whom I will bring will give no offence, and he dances as well as can be desired. He is a Russian—penniless, alas, since the revolution."

"A compatriot," Glenlitten observed. "Her ladyship is half Russian."

The man hurried off and Félice looked up into her husband's face with a little grimace.

"Indeed," she murmured, "without you I do not care to dance, Andrew. You think always of my pleasure, but sometimes you do not realise that my pleasure is to be just with you."

"Another word," he whispered, "and I shall carry you off home, although it is only eleven o'clock. Here comes the young man—looks all right. By Jove, Félice, do you see who it is? It's the young Russian —it's the chap those fellows from the barracks brought over."

"A dancing professional!" she exclaimed, and for a moment there was something unrecognisable in her tone—a little quaver, half of fear, half of indignation.

"I admire the fellow's pluck, anyway," Andrew observed.

Prince Charles, piloted by Mario, came to a standstill before the table. The usual greetings were exchanged, and the young man's perfectly natural manner prevented anything in the shape of awkwardness.

"You are surprised to see me here, yes?" he asked. "Well, like the rest of us, I must earn some money, and to dance is almost my only accomplishment. I would explain," he added, turning to Andrew, "that when I accepted your hospitality the other night I was not then engaged here."

"Wouldn't have made an atom of difference," was the good-natured reply. "Hope you'll look us up at Curzon Street some time."

The young man bowed gravely.

"Madame will dance?" he invited.

Félice rose to her feet, after an almost imperceptible hesitation, and a moment later they glided off. The two men watched them as they threaded their way through the crowd.

"Madame dances amazingly," Mario ventured.

"She's jolly good," his distinguished patron agreed. "So is your brandy, by the way—blended, of course, but wonderful. That young protégé of

yours was brought over to dine at my house in Hampshire one night a few weeks ago—staying with the officers at the barracks—Prince Charles of Suess, he called himself then."

"Without a doubt that is his name," the manager assented. "Mr. de Suess, he prefers to be called here. It goes better with his profession."

Meanwhile, the young man was not neglecting this heaven-sent opportunity. Although his eyes remained respectfully aloof from his companion's, and his lips seemed scarcely to move, he was talking all the time.

"You should have let me know that you were coming to town," he said. "There is grave trouble at home."

"There is always trouble at home," she answered, a little coldly. "And, understand, if you please, Charles, that I see no reason why I should have let you know."

His face was set like a mask but he waited until they had reached the farther end of the room.

"You recognise no responsibilities?" he demanded.

"I am beginning to ask myself whether I need," she replied. "I have committed no sin in marrying. My husband is a very generous man, and I would rather tell him about you all than continue this concealment. I am afraid mine is not a household that any one would be proud of, but at least Andrew would remember that they were my people, and I know that he would be kind. I do not understand

why they all persist in remaining unknown to him."

"They are right," the young man declared.

"The time will come," she warned him calmly, "when I shall exercise my own judgment."

"Then, if you do," he rejoined, "you will regret it all your life. I can promise you that."

"What brought you to Glenlitten?" she asked abruptly.

"No wish to see my charming sister, I can assure you," he answered. "Those two men had been rather decent to me in town. They play bridge very badly, and they asked me down for a couple of nights. In any case, my visit did no harm."

She shivered a little.

"I wish to dance no more," she said. "I am worried."

The music had stopped, but her partner stood in the middle of the floor and clapped.

"We cannot finish like this," he told her, as the music started again. "When I tell them that you are in town they will all want to see you. They need help, and you must give them help."

"Am I not helping them all the time?" she asked wearily. "I have done no sin in marrying. I wish to be happy. Why may I not be happy? Why do you all close in around me with evil faces? Why do you forbid me to tell my husband of the existence of any one of you? I do not understand it."

The dance had changed into a waltz. They swayed lightly round the lower part of the room, loitering

with the music. The young man waited until they had reached the most remote corner again.

"You are all sensitiveness and scruples, Félice," he complained. "The world is made for life and for living. Why should you think of yourself only? Why should we others not live? Why should you not help us to live?"

"Do I not try?" she demanded.

"Try? But with what? It is to you the great good fortune has been given. Now, listen once more. You know where we live—Number ten, Milden Square. Between four and six in the afternoon is the time we are there and awake. Between four and six we shall await you, to-morrow, or the next day. . . . Your husband will pay me for the dance? There is no money in the house."

Her head scarcely reached his shoulder, but she glanced at him as a woman who looks at something crawling upon the ground.

"My husband will do all that is usual," she assured him.

As the music died away, they returned to their table. Andrew rose to his feet and held her chair.

"Very much obliged to you," he said pleasantly to her late partner. "I am sure my wife enjoyed the dance very much."

He touched the other's hand lightly, leaving some notes in his palm. The young man bowed.

"It is a great pleasure to dance with Madame," he said. "Perhaps again?"

"Not to-night," Félice decided. "Another time perhaps. The room is a little crowded."

He departed with a formal bow. Andrew filled his wife's glass with champagne.

"Dear," he said, "there is no one in the world who dances like you. These professional lads and lassies aren't in it. There were two of them from the Adelphi dancing close to you most of the time. The woman dances a *pas seul* there, but you made them look clumsy. You looked—well, just like a fleck of foam on the top of a wave. I'm not much of a chap at comparisons, you know, but it was wonderful to sit here and watch you."

Her hand stole into his.

"Andrew," she whispered, "where did you learn in your dull Anglo-Saxon bringing-up to say such sweet things and to say them so often? It makes one so happy. I do think that I dance well, but I love to be told. I do think sometimes that I must be quite nice to watch, but how wonderful to be told so by any one you care for. Do we stay much longer?"

There was a faint tremor in her question, a light almost of adoration in her glowing eyes. He struck the table with the palm of his hand.

"Waiter, the bill," he ordered.

Later, they smoked a cigarette together in the little boudoir leading out of her bedroom.

"You do not regret those partridges so very much?" she asked wistfully.

"My dear," he assured her, "you have changed life for me completely. Shooting, hunting, fishing—they don't count. It is just being with you that makes me happy. You can take me round the world in a tourist steamer or you can take me to New York and lodge me in a sky-scraper hotel. I don't care. I have just mentioned those two things," he explained, leaning over and splashing a little more soda water into his glass, "because I have always looked upon them as being the worst that could happen to any one, but in plain words, wherever we are together, and you remain as sweet as you always are, that is the place for me."

She left her chair and sat upon his knee.

"I think," she told him, "I am glad that we came to London for a little time. I love Glenlitten. It is too wonderful a home that you have given me, dear Andrew, but just for a week—it is so good to be away from that room. Husband!"

"Darling!"

"I am afraid of that long-faced friend of yours. I am afraid of him. You will not let him hurt me? You will not let them come and ask questions which I cannot answer. I do not wish to keep on having to think of those few terrible moments—having them always recalled to me."

Tighter and tighter his arms clasped her.

"Sweetheart," he promised, "no one shall ever bully you, I promise you that."

"You trust me—altogether?" she whispered. "You know my great, great secret?"

"I shall know it better if you tell it to me," he answered.

Then she whispered it—and soon afterwards fell asleep.

Long after he had carried her to bed and laid her between the cool, sweet sheets, he sat by himself, thinking. There must be some explanation of Richard Cotton's cynical and disconcerting theories. If only he could stumble upon it without distress to her, close the whole business up, and yet do justice to the accused man. To him, the thing seemed almost pathetically simple. A burglar climbed in through the window. That was a fact which no one denied. He was probably seen on the ladder by this fellow De Besset who had naturally enough rushed in to warn Félice. The burglar had shot him and gone off with the jewels. Now he was to be hanged. Why not? And then came Dick Cotton with his damned suspicions, his enquiries, his doubts,—Cotton who had dared to stir up the great fear in Félice's heart lest, owing to her brief period of unconsciousness, the man should die who had done no harm. But if the burglar was not the guilty man, who was? He sat and smoked and frowned. At last he arrived at a determination. Cotton was, after all, notwithstanding the difference in their years, one of

his oldest friends. Why should there be this mystery between them? Why should the whole truth not be told now instead of later on? To-morrow he would put this before him and drag out whatever was at the back of his mind.

CHAPTER X

"I'm going to be a trifle brutal," the great lawyer declared, after he had shaken hands with his unexpected visitor and waved him to a chair. "I've half a dozen people waiting, as you may have seen. Get on with it, Andrew, there's a good fellow."

"I'll match you," was the prompt reply. "I want to know what the hell you're worrying Félice about that night for?"

"I worrying—your wife?"

"Yes, you. She's not the girl she was, except by fits and starts. Until a week or so ago, she was like a little sprite of happiness. She couldn't move without singing, her eyes and her feet danced all the time. Now she's completely changed. She's frightened. That night frightened her, and since then you've scared her half to death. Now what's at the back of your mind? The whole business seems clear enough to every one else."

"Stop!" Sir Richard begged.

Andrew drew off his other glove and threw it into the hat by his side.

"I'll stop when I've finished," he persisted. "Let me get this off my chest, Dick. We're old friends, and what's the good of being old friends if we can't be honest with each other. As I say, here I have the sweetest and happiest little wife who ever drifted from heaven into a man's life. There was never a cloud upon her face, never anything but a smile

upon her lips. Then comes that night. What happens? A burglary. Well, why not? The Glenlitten jewels are worth having a shot at, if the man's clever enough. This one apparently was. Then De Besset chances, most unfortunately, to be looking out of his window and sees the fellow on his way up the ladder."

"Stop!" Sir Richard insisted. "There is not a shred of evidence to prove that De Besset did anything of the sort."

"But what evidence is necessary?" Andrew demanded. "Why else should he have been in Félice's room?"

The lawyer made no reply. There was a brief silence, the significance of which Andrew, fortunately for the preservation of his self-control, failed to grasp.

"Naturally, as soon as he's seen the fellow," he continued, "he dashes in to warn Félice and protect her if necessary—clang the bell or anything. He did just what I should have done. He arrives there as the burglar gets his knee over the window sill and is on the point of clutching the jewels. He goes for him, poor devil, gets it through the heart, and away flies the burglar. Félice has just strength enough to cry out, and the thing's over. Well, now they have caught the burglar, and a damned good job too. But what on earth are you worrying Félice about? Why do you come and talk all this terrible tosh to her about a man's life, and her evidence, and where the flash came from? How could that poor

child tell where the flash came from in her panic-stricken state? And what the hell does it matter, anyway? It's your job as a lawyer, of course, to get the burglar off if you can, but for God's sake get him off some other way than by frightening Félice to death. He shot De Besset all right. As for any one else being in the room—between you and me, Richard, that's tosh. There couldn't have been any one else there. Félice must have discovered them before she turned the light out. The thing is utter rot to start with, and yet you go on bullying the poor child until she doesn't know where she is. . . . No, don't stop me! Let's go to the bottom of it, Dick. I respect your profession all right. You're hired to get a man off if you can, and you often do it damned cleverly, but in this case the man's got to get what he deserves, whoever defends him. What right have you to come and, for the sake of stirring up a cloud of mystery, frighten Félice so that she'll go into the witness box, if ever you drag her there, in such a state of mind that she won't know what she's saying? She saw nothing except the flash. She heard a shot. She saw a man fall dead, and that man her friend. My God, that's shock enough for any woman! You can't make any more out of it. You can't change it. Why drive her distracted by pretending that if she tells her story differently she may save a man's life. Your profession's all right, Dick, you have to do your best in it, but there are limits. I tell you frankly I'm not going to have Félice driven half

crazy for you to try to win one more case and save a man from the gallows who ought to hang. Take that from me, Dick."

Andrew paused after probably the longest speech he had ever made in his life. Sir Richard, after his one interruption, had listened with unchanged face. He hesitated for a moment before replying.

"Andrew," he said gravely, "you have spoken exactly as Andrew, Marquis of Glenlitten, husband of a very adorable wife, would be likely to speak. I have listened to you, haven't I, without interruption? I have heard every word you have said. I sympathise with you more than I shall ever be able to tell you. And listen—I shall go so far as this. If I were able to accept the situation as you have quoted it, I would abjure all the craft I have acquired, I would seek to make no capital by any effort at a sensational *dénouement* to the trial of this man, I would withdraw from the case, and I would say: 'Here is a criminal. Sooner than that I should hurt the wife of a dear friend by torturing her, in the witness box or elsewhere, let him hang. He is guilty; let him hang.' But you see against that I have reason to believe there is something else."

"What?" Andrew demanded.

The lawyer looked across the table. The words were precise, and the light in his eyes was clear and truthful.

"I do most firmly and honestly believe," he said,

"not as a lawyer, but as a man, that it was not the burglar who shot De Besset."

There was a brief, tense silence. Some one in the adjoining waiting room coughed, a taxi drew up at the outside entrance, there was the sound of swing doors, another of the waiting clients rustled his newspaper. The background of these trifling sounds seemed to make the breathless silence which reigned in the room where the two men sat all the more impressive. Andrew was once again, and more forcibly than ever, oppressed with the idea of sinister possibilities. He stared into his friend's face, into the narrow, clear eyes, tried with all the force of which he was capable to learn what lay behind that wrinkled forehead, to gather some idea of what was passing in the mind of the man.

"If it was not the burglar who shot De Besset, who do you suppose it was?" he demanded. "You do not for a moment dare to suggest—that it might have been Félice?"

Sir Richard shook his head firmly.

"That is one evil thought, Andrew," he said, "which you can expel from your mind at once. I am sure that it was not Félice. Your wife could never be guilty of a crime of that sort."

"A crime of *that* sort?" Andrew repeated harshly. "What the devil do you mean?"

"It was crudely put," the other confessed. "I have the greatest admiration and respect for your wife, Andrew. I have almost envied you your happiness.

Félice is so sweet, so wonderful, so delightful in her simplicity, in her unspoilt childishness—but you see how my life has been spent."

He waved his hand in a little gesture towards the dusty, volume-lined walls, the great rows of tin boxes.

"I live in a world of facts, grim facts. I live for facts. They rule my life. They guide my brain. And now, to close our interview, I come to this, Andrew. I believe, and I have already some evidence of the fact, that De Besset was shot by a third man who has not yet appeared in the case."

Andrew glared at him across the desk.

"A third man!" he muttered. "A man who must have been concealed in my wife's bedroom! God, man, I wonder I don't take you by the throat!"

"I wonder you don't, knowing you as I do," the lawyer replied solemnly. "Yet I have to tell you of my conviction, Andrew, and, believing that, can you blame me if I try to save this fellow's life, to seek the truth at any cost?"

Andrew rose unsteadily to his feet. He made no attempt to shake hands with his friend. He clutched at the side of the table.

"One more question," he persisted. "Do you believe that Félice knew or guessed that there was another man in the room?"

"I'm afraid I do," was the grave reply. "Remember, Andrew, she may have some perfectly good explanation and, when the time comes, she will probably tell us everything. You see," he went on ear-

nestly, "the law is like a great machine. I don't pretend that I have any sentimental sympathy with this fellow in jail. He probably doesn't deserve it. He's one of the criminal classes, and the criminal classes are better got out of the way whenever you can lay hold of them, but to the legal mind, Andrew—and you see that's my life, I can't get away from it—we've got to follow where the light leads. I'll go even so far as this," he added, rising to his feet and walking slowly towards the door, with his hand on the other man's shoulder, "it isn't so much that wretched fellow's life I want to save. I've got to follow the light that leads to the truth. It's our job, Andrew. When you were a soldier, your job was to obey orders and fight your way through. Well, my peacetime job is something like that—to follow the light where it leads."

Andrew made no response. His mouth was set, his carriage perfectly steady, but he was oppressed with the queer sensation of having stumbled into another world, full of unreal people and unreal possibilities. The door was opened, the buzz of voices commenced outside, the next client rose expectantly, and Glenlitten, without any word of farewell, passed through the musty offices, across the crowded pavement to his waiting car. He felt like a man in whom speech has been stifled. On the way from the City westwards, he sat with grimly folded arms, looking out of the window with the eyes of a blind man.

CHAPTER XI

It was certainly a strange dispensation of chance that Andrew, on his homeward way, after leaving his gunsmith and walking a short distance to rejoin his car, should have seen upon the door of a block of offices the brass-plated announcement:

MR. FELIX MAIN

PRIVATE DETECTIVE

He studied the plate for several seconds and finally acted upon an uncontrollable impulse. He entered the hospitable open portals, mounted the stairs, and knocked at the door upon which the name was printed in black letters. A very modern-looking young woman, with flaxen hair, short-cropped and short of skirt, looked up enquiringly.

"Is Mr. Felix Main in?" Andrew asked.

"He is," the girl admitted. "What about it?"

"I should like to see him."

"Business?"

"Yes. I sha'n't keep him long."

"Any name?"

"Glenlitten—Lord Glenlitten."

The girl resisted an obvious impulse to put out her tongue and indulged instead in a grimace.

"I'll tell him," she promised, and disappeared.

She knocked at an inner door. There was a murmur of voices from inside the mahogany-encased tabernacle. She reappeared a little chastened.

"Mr. Main will spare you a few minutes," she announced and lifted a flap of the counter.

Andrew was ushered into a bare-looking office, in which at a writing table sat a small man with scanty red hair, gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, and pale, yet shrewd eyes. He studied his visitor without apparent curiosity.

"Pray sit down," he invited. "I have five minutes at your disposal. Please tell me what you want."

Andrew looked at the proffered chair, dusted it with a fine, cambric handkerchief, but hesitated before seating himself.

"Five minutes may not be enough," he remarked. "Perhaps I had better call another time."

Mr. Felix Main looked more closely at his visitor, who was in his way impressive, and began to feel some doubts.

"You are not by any chance the Marquis of Glenlitten, are you?" he enquired.

"My name," was the terse response.

A subtle change seemed to permeate the whole being of Mr. Felix Main. The suspicion passed from his manner. The slight arrogance was forgotten. The *pince-nez* were laid upon the table.

"Dear me, dear me!" he exclaimed. "I am very honoured. This is most interesting. I have read every

line in the Press concerning that intriguing burglary at your house. In fact, I was so interested that I travelled down into the country and took the liberty of attending the inquest."

"The devil you did!" Andrew commented grimly. "That's the last sort of holiday I should have indulged in. I suppose you know, then, that they've got the burglar?"

"I have just read the account of his arrest. Quite a smart piece of work that. You couldn't tell me a thing about the case, Lord Glenlitten, that I don't know already."

"Well, that makes it easier," Andrew observed, leaning a little forward in his uncomfortable chair. "If you've read all the details, I don't need to go over them again. Seems simple enough, on the face of it, doesn't it? Up the ladder comes the burglar, and in rushes poor De Besset who could see him coming from his window. There's only one thing for the burglar to do, if he wants to get away with the booty, and he does it."

"Just so," Mr. Main concurred. "He shoots."

"Plain as a pikestaff," Andrew agreed emphatically. "Now comes the trouble though. The man they've arrested pleads guilty to the burglary, but denies ever having possessed a revolver in his life, and insists upon it that De Besset was killed by some one else concealed in the room."

"Of course he had to do that," the detective commented. "Bit thin, though."

Andrew smiled with satisfaction. For the first time, he felt that he had done a shrewd thing in coming to see Mr. Felix Main.

"Ridiculous on the face of it," he scoffed.

"And yet," the detective reflected, "what else could the fellow do? You couldn't expect him to put his own neck in the noose. If he didn't do it, some one else did. It seems to me a pretty feeble effort, though."

"That's exactly what I say," Andrew assented eagerly. "Now this is why I've come to see you. I daresay you know that Sir Richard Cotton's taken up the case. He's going to instruct counsel to defend the prisoner. He is actually exploiting the theory that there was a third man present in the bedchamber who fired the shot."

"Any evidence?" the detective enquired, glancing a little stealthily at his visitor.

"None that I can imagine," Andrew replied. "To my mind, the suggestion is simply damned rot. Dick Cotton's an old friend of mine, and he can be very convincing at times, but he's got a bee in his bonnet over this affair. What I say is—and my wife agrees with me—that it was practically impossible for a third person to be in her bedroom whilst she was there, and unknown to her."

Mr. Felix Main stroked his chin.

"It's the only possible defence," he pointed out, "but unless Sir Richard Cotton has something up his sleeve, I shouldn't think he has the ghost of a

chance. Your wife's evidence at the inquest appeared to me conclusive."

"Well, I'm glad to find you take a sensible view of the case," Andrew declared, with a sigh of relief. "Now what I want you to do is to go down to Glenlitten and try to find out, if you can, what Cotton is aiming at. I'll give you authority to go over the house, and you can ask any one whatever questions you choose. Dick Cotton's an old friend of mine, but I'm damned if I'm going to have my wife worried to death in the witness box just because it's his business to get his client off."

"I take it, then," Mr. Felix Main observed cautiously, "that what you want me to do is to discover on what lines Sir Richard Cotton is working, and whom else he intends to try to drag into the case?"

"Precisely," Andrew agreed. "Get to work. I give you a free hand for expenses. The law's at the back of you. They want the man proved guilty. All I want is justice done and not to have my wife bothered by senseless questions. You can talk to her if you like for a few minutes. She'll tell you all that she saw and that was absolutely nothing. The whole affair's as plain as a pikestaff. You must see that for yourself."

"I do," Mr. Felix Main declared. "A free hand as regards expenses, I think you said, Lord Glenlitten."

Andrew emptied his pocketbook.

"Here's a hundred and fifty on account," he said,

handing the notes over. "Now get at it. Nail this thing on to the burglar so that my wife hasn't to go into the box and be badgered about that possible third person. Find out if you can what old Cotton's driving at and cut the ground from under his feet. There are the jewels to be recovered too—ten thousand pounds' reward on those, you know. The burglar only seems to have had one ring on him when he was caught."

Mr. Felix Main was entirely convincing.

"I understand the situation exactly, Lord Glenlitten," he said, as he escorted his departing client to the door. "I shall work on the lines you lay down, and I think I can promise you complete success."

Andrew walked back almost happily. He was impressed by the fact that he had behaved like a remarkably shrewd man. He was attracted by some red roses in a florist's shop and he sent home a wonderful basketful. Afterwards he called in at his club but found it sparsely filled, owing to the season of the year. He came in for a certain amount of chaff, however.

"Hullo, Andrew, lost the family plate, eh? That's an old trick. Which insurance company?" one member demanded.

"Curse these plutocrats," another grumbled. "Fifty thousand pounds' worth of jewels, and I can't afford lobster for lunch because it's eighteen pence extra."

Glenlitten ensconced himself in the most comfortable easy-chair he could find and ordered a whisky and soda.

"You fellows are a brutal and unsympathetic crowd," he complained. "I have lost jewels amounting to more than your combined brains could ever have earned in a hundred years. My wife has seen a man shot, and will have to go into the witness box about it, and instead of coming and extending me the silent hand of sympathy you commence this frivolous effort at chaff. Waiter, offer drinks to these gentlemen. Will that appease you, I wonder?"

"I have never before," his immediate neighbour declared, as he gave his order, "heard our friend Glenlitten so eloquent."

"Never heard him open his mouth except to give an order," another affirmed. "As to standing a drink—why, the fellow's gone crazy. Feeling convinced that the opportunity will never occur again, I'll take a double Scotch, waiter."

"I pass over your rudeness," Andrew groaned. "I came in here hoping to receive a little sympathy. What do I find? Nothing but ribaldry."

"A callous crowd," a man on the outskirts of the circle admitted, "but in these hard times no man's wife ought to own a necklace worth thirty thousand pounds."

"Belonged to Queen Charlotte," Andrew pointed out, in an aggrieved fashion. "I never bought it or

had anything to do with it. Just came to me because it had to."

"An inheritance like that should be sold for the benefit of the poor," a millionaire peer suggested.

"There are no poor," a fellow Crœsus grumbled. "The only poor nowadays are those who suffer from the demands made upon them because they are too rich."

Andrew sighed.

"If you chaps are going to be clever," he murmured—

A famous K.C. strolled in, with an evening paper in his hand, and joined the fringe of the group.

"Seen the latest scandal about the Glenlitten burglary case?" he demanded.

"Glenlitten's here," some one warned him. "Seems jolly well fed up about the case."

The newcomer surreptitiously disposed of the paper he was carrying.

"Scurrilous rags these fourth editions," he remarked. "Do I see free drinks going? Mine's a whisky and soda."

CHAPTER XII

THE newspaper headlines the next morning were riotous. That sometimes *bête noir* of Scotland Yard, the enquiring journalist, had taken a hand in the game and scented out a fresh sensation. The whole tragedy at Glenlitten Court was revived in a new light. The burglary and murder had at first been linked together as a matter of course. Now there was a whole crop of new rumours. It was openly hinted that evidence had been procured of the presence of a third man in my lady's chamber. Who was he? Where did he come from? For what purpose was he there? Was he too a burglar—or what? Andrew deliberately tore into pieces the most scurrilous of the newspapers and mounted to his wife's boudoir. She was seated in front of a fire, sipping her coffee, and a single glance told him that he had been too late. The offending newspaper lay by her side, and the drawn look was back upon her face. He bent and kissed her.

"Been reading all that tosh!" he remarked scornfully. "Upon my word, our journalism is getting beneath contempt. Nothing but rank sensationalism and lies."

She smiled a little wanly.

"You are very good, Andrew," she said. "You speak cheerfully, but I know very well that it hurts you as it does me. According to these papers, to-day all of the people in London are asking the same ques-

tion that your friend Sir Richard Cotton first hinted at— 'Who was the third person in my bedroom who did shoot and kill De Besset?' These newspapers do say that he was either an accomplice of the burglar, and probably has the rest of the jewels, or they keep silent because they dare not say what they think—and I have a pain in my heart, Andrew, because, although they do not dare to say it in plain words, I know what they would like others to think, and it hurts me."

Her husband's language for a minute or two was unrestrained. Félice listened to him with approval.

"I like to hear you swear, dear Andrew," she confided. "It sounds so natural, and it seems to break up the clouds, but after all, this is very terrible. Do they think, these people, that I would have a lover when I have you?"

She drew him down to her.

"The thing which hurts, dear," she continued, "is that they should doubt me for your sake. Yesterday evening, before you returned, this new man whom you had been to see—Mr. Felix Main—was here. I answered everything he asked me, although at first I did not understand, but afterwards it became very clear. Still I answered. I told him everything. I hope he believed me. I did tell him the truth. Andrew, I did want to like all your friends so much, but Sir Richard Cotton, can he be so great a friend of yours when he has started this terrible thing against us?"

"There is something greater for Cotton in the world than my friendship, or any one else's friendship," he reminded her, a little sadly. "He has always been the same in that one way—the most ambitious man who ever breathed. Step by step, on the bodies of those he hangs, or on the gratitude of those he saves, Dick Cotton must mount all the time. What does he care about the others? With these men their work becomes a disease. It's all drama with them—life at second hand. They send a man to the gallows or back to the bosom of his family, and they don't care a damn which, if it's the way they've pleaded. Don't you bother about Cotton, dear. He is trying to find out what he wants to find out, but my man Main is paid to find out the truth, and nothing else. The truth is all we want. Main will have it all clear long before Cotton can get you in the box. . . . Now what about a stroll down Bond Street and a little luncheon at the Ritz?"

"Listen," she begged earnestly. "To-day—just leave me alone. You have all these horses in London. Do ride in the Park as you used to. Lunch at your club and play bridge there. Apart we may forget this thing for a little while. I think that it would be best. I wish it."

He rose to his feet, unwilling but acquiescent.

"As a matter of fact," he confessed, "I should rather like a ride. I'm perfectly certain I'm putting on weight up here. I've lots of business too. My lawyers are clamouring for a call, my bankers want

to show me how to save I don't know how much a year, my tailors are at times sarcastic, at others reproachful because I don't give them any time, and I have a serious appointment with my gunsmith. Very well, dear, I'll leave you alone, but we dine."

"Of course! I could not spare you at dinner."

"We'll dance too," he suggested. "My leg is better to-day. I'm sure I could hobble round."

She clapped her hands.

"Go and have it massaged again," she advised. "We'll dance, Andrew—naturally—just as though nothing in the world mattered. Every one shall see us happy, and alone together."

She sat quite still for some time after he had left her. She heard him in his room, moving about, heard the scratching of a match as he lit a cigarette, heard his servant brushing imaginary dust from his coat, heard the front door close behind him as he left. Then she rang the bell for her maid.

"Annette, dress me," she directed. "I shall be lunching here by myself. An omelette—very little. Afterwards I shall want the car. I am going to my dressmakers' and I have some calls to make."

She crossed the threshold of the apartment in Milden Square late that afternoon with aversion stamped upon her sensitive face. They all stared at her, these strange people of hers. There was little of greeting on her part, less of welcome on theirs. Old Madame Protinoff rose from behind the sam-

ovar to peer ill-naturedly forward. Her shabby, grey-haired husband scowled from his seat in front of the fire. The others all looked curiously at this strange yet brilliant visitor. Charles alone stepped forward to greet her.

"It is time you came," he said. "Every one has been sitting here waiting for you."

"Waiting for me or for what I may have brought?" she asked tonelessly.

A handsome sullen-faced girl, wrapped in a shabby kimono, removed a cigarette from her over-painted lips, threw down a pad with which she had been rubbing her nails, and glanced across the room.

"That depends upon what you have brought, little one," she said. "Living here is dear, and there are many of us."

"It seems to me," Félice ventured, "that some of you should be earning money."

The old man glared at her.

"Ho, ho!" he exclaimed. "And at my age too! What a daughter! Even if there was no rheumatism in my bones! Would your husband engage me for a butler, or should I carry up the coals for your ladyship?"

"As for me," the stout woman behind the samovar expostulated, "I worked in the restaurant until the dropsy came to my legs. I could do no more. I should have a doctor every day."

A younger edition of Charles looked up from a stained novel he was reading.

"Charles is teaching me dance steps," he announced. "When I am a little older I shall do like him. I shall get money from the ladies who dance with me. Oh, it is easy! Charles knows all about it. He picks out the old ones and he makes them pay."

"And I too," the girl Anna said scornfully—"I earn money, the same way that you would have to earn it, little Félice, but for the luck of things. I earn money, but it costs much for clothes here, and one never knows—men are such brutes."

Félice sank into a chair and looked around with something like despair.

"I think," she decided, "that the time has come when I must confess, when I must tell my husband all about you."

There was an instant clamour. The old man and the woman shouted one against the other. Charles joined in and they all three talked faster and faster. Anna only laughed.

"Yes, tell him," she put in, during a momentary silence. "Get us all asked down to your fine house. I wonder what your husband will think of his crew of degenerate relations? Will he like his sister-in-law? He might take a fancy to me, you know, Félice. They say I am still handsome. He can meet me any day at six o'clock in the Burlington Arcade, and Cork Street afterwards."

"Oh, be quiet, all of you!" Félice cried, shuddering, "Listen to me. My husband is generous, but we have not a single secret from each other except this, and

he must wonder sometimes where the money goes to. The housekeeping is no concern of mine. There is a woman who arranges all that. My clothes—the bills are paid by his secretary. In this country, where one has an establishment, no one pays otherwise. Yet it is always the same thing. There is not a single thing for which I pay at the time, and yet I always need money. Soon he must ask me—even out of curiosity—where it goes? What shall I say? What can I say? He is very generous. I think that he is rich. He is fond of me. He will understand that you have all known suffering for so many years, that you have —have changed. It is better to speak the truth."

Again the clamour. Félice hated the ugliness of it, the discordance, the unwholesome face of that repulsive woman with her unkempt grey hair. Thank God that she, at any rate, was no relative. The hugely framed, gaunt old man held up his hand. He insisted upon silence from the others whilst he spoke.

"Listen," he pointed out bitterly, "how can you speak of us? I who have been in prison. Your stepmother who—well, she's had no clothes to wear for so many years that she has become—well, you see. And I—I've had no clothes for two years. Besides, your stepmother—"

He hesitated. The woman laughed—a hideous travesty of mirth.

"How delicate you have become all at once," she jeered. "Why should you mind? Confess that I was

your cook. Lucky you were too, to have found such a good cook with a little money saved. You would have starved if it had not been for me. Aristocrats!" she scoffed. "Why, you would have been in the workhouse but for me. I know what I think of the lot of you!"

"Your stepmother has spoken for herself," the old man went on, with a sneer. "Then there is your brother Charles—the best of the lot of us to look at, perhaps, but a professional dancer—a Prince of Suess, mind—a son of mine—and a professional dancer! Then there is that ignorant young lad, Paul, also your brother, whose one idea in life is to imitate the vices of his elders. Even if we dared disclose ourselves, and even here in London face certain death, what would he think of the brood, this English husband of yours?"

Charles began to speak rapidly in Russian. It was clear that he had a certain amount of authority over the others. They listened in gloomy silence. When he had finished, Félice opened her pocketbook. They all crowded round, gazing covetously into its compartments.

"Ha, ha!" the old man, who had stumbled to his feet, declared. "Bank notes! I see them coming. Just in time too. Only yesterday I discovered where the real vodka can still be bought."

"I could go out and dance at some of the smaller places if I had a dress suit," Paul confided. "I couldn't be a swell like Charles, but they would have

me at the Golden Globe round the corner. One might easily earn a little, but one must have money in one's pocket to start with."

Félice emptied the notes out upon the table wearily.

"There are seventy pounds here," she announced. "Make the best of them."

"It is not much for an English marchioness," the woman scoffed.

"Félice will come again soon," the old man mumbled.

"I must have my suit of clothes," Paul shouted, dancing round the table and trying to snatch at the notes.

"I must have twenty pounds," the girl insisted. "I must have new clothes, or I will not go out any more. There must be wine for dinner too. I will drink no more beer. It makes one coarse."

"Divide the money amongst yourselves," Charles enjoined, with a scornful little wave of the hand. "This time I need nothing. I am going to give Félice dancing lessons three times a week. That will do for me."

Félice watched the struggle for the notes, and her face was almost hard.

"It is terrible, this!" she exclaimed. "You seem to have forgotten everything. Even poverty should not make you like this. I am in earnest when I tell you that I shall not come any more. I shall just confide in Andrew and let him do what he wishes. He will

give you enough to live on for my sake, I am sure."

It was as though Félice had thrown a bomb amongst them. They seemed to be all talking at once. They seemed to be all stricken with a sudden terror. Even Anna was leaning across the table, spitting out angry words. Félice covered her ears with her hands.

"Stop!" she cried passionately. "Stop, or I will go away at once!"

The babel ceased. Serge Protinoff alone took up the burden of their fear-stricken prayers.

"Félice, listen," he said, his voice rasping and nervous, his features twitching. "When you speak of telling any single soul on earth of our being alive, of our presence here, you speak of death. Some day I promise you shall know the awful truth. To-day I can tell you no more than what I have told you before. We paid for our deliverance in blood."

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a small, rather beautiful medallion, carved in black ivory. He laid it before her.

"We must have peace in our minds," he went on. "Put your left hand upon your heart, Félice. Touch the Ikon with your right fingers. Swear that until we give the word—Charles or I—you will breathe nothing to your husband or to any other person of our existence here in London."

"You must swear it!" Charles cried, leaning over her.

"Swear it, Félice," Anna muttered.

Félice obeyed. With half-closed eyes she spoke the

words they desired. The old man drew a sigh of relief. Once more the Ikon vanished into his pocket.

"I have done what you wished," Félice pointed out, "but it seems strange to me, this overwhelming fear. My husband tells me that England gives shelter to all the world. Who could blame you for what you did to escape from those fiends in Russia?"

"Understand this much, child," the old man said. "England gives us willing shelter, but not all the police in London could turn away the death which would come to us if in Moscow they knew of our living. Rumour slips from tongue to tongue, from ear to ear. Not out of this room must pass the knowledge of our existence."

"I have sworn," Félice reminded them. "Now I will go."

"Wait, little one!" Serge Protinoff begged, rustling the notes which he had grabbed in his hand. "You will change your mind about not coming again, now that you know how impossible it is to confide even in your husband. You would not be so ungrateful as to leave us to starve. Remember that much of the money we brought away from Russia went to Madame de Sandillac for you."

"Madame de Sandillac always spoke as though she had received nothing," Félice told them.

"She was a miser," Charles exclaimed.

"An *ingrate!*" his father declared.

"A liar," Anna put in.

"She was very kind to me," Félice said. "I would

rather not hear you say things about her, please. One must remember that she is dead. About the money I do not understand. I shall not try to understand, but since we speak of these things, I will ask you all yet another question."

Serge Protinoff moved uneasily upon his seat.

"Is it your place, my daughter," he asked, "to come here and deal with us as though we were mendicants?"

"I have no wish to do that," she assured him. "Indeed, I am very sorry to see you in such straits, and what I can do I shall, but tell me, why did not one of you write or visit me all those years I lived with Madame de Sandillac? She was a good woman, without a doubt, but she was stern and silent. I had no friends, no sympathy, no word from any one of you, even to tell me that you were alive. Why did you cut yourselves off so completely, only to rediscover me when you read in the papers that I was married?"

There was a moment's silence. Serge Protinoff shook his head gravely, took off his spectacles, and wiped them. Charles glowered across at her angrily.

"For years after you went to Madame de Sandillac," the old man told her, "the château was watched week by week, month by month, in the hope that one of us would venture there, and by that means the whereabouts of the rest of us might be traced. We cut ourselves off from you, Félice, because we were in fear of our lives. You had all the money that we

could spare. There was nothing we could do for you; there was nothing you could do for us. Often we spoke of you, often we hoped that the time might come when we might be one family once more. That can never be now. God has been good to you, my child. You have met with great good fortune. It does not seem unnatural that in a very small way you should try to help your family. Remember that whether that wicked old woman denied it or not, half the money we brought from Russia went to Madame de Sandillac for your care. The rest has gone. We struggle along, thanks, during the last few months, to you, but it is difficult. It is not too cheap, either, to live here in London."

"We were better in Paris," the girl muttered.

"There were more restaurants there where one dances," the young boy complained, "and many cafés where one could drink cheaply."

Félice turned away.

"Before I go," she concluded, "I have a word to say to you alone, Charles."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"To me alone?" he repeated, looking at her questioningly.

She nodded. He rose to his feet, took her by the arm, and led her into the adjoining apartment, a kitchen, fetid and hot, without ventilation, with the odour of many strongly seasoned meals hanging nauseatingly around. He closed the door.

"Well, what is it?" he asked coldly.

"You have seen the papers?" she demanded. "The burglar who came to Glenlitten that night has been caught."

The young man moistened his dry lips.

"What of it?"

"He has employed a lawyer to defend him—a very clever man. There will be many questions asked and much trouble."

At close quarters one realised that there was an ugly line about the young man's lips. His light-coloured eyebrows drew closer together. He frowned down at her.

"What do you mean?" he muttered. "What questions can be asked? What trouble is there to be feared?"

She felt suddenly overpoweringly sick. The great horror was insurgent in her. She felt that she must cry out or break away. The smell of the place, the proximity of the young man, something she saw in his eyes, were all alike revolting to her.

"I saw—but why should I tell you what I saw?" she faltered. "There was darkness. But this lawyer, I know him, he speaks of evidence."

"What evidence?"

"As to that, he remains silent. He is a lawyer seeking the truth. He will wait until the trial. I had to tell you this. If I stay here another moment, I shall faint."

The colour was ebbing from her cheeks. He threw open the door.

"You are a fool," he snarled. "There was nothing to be seen in that darkness. There was a burglar, De Besset, and you. You know what happened. No more rubbish!"

He slammed the door, and Félice went unsteadily down the steps with the nightmare still in her brain.

CHAPTER XIII

Andrew, Marquis of Glenlitten, once more occupied the client's chair in Mr. Felix Main's unpretentious office. The detective had greeted his visitor solemnly, almost portentously.

"I am glad your lordship was able to come this morning," he said. "I have been down to Glenlitten for a couple of days—returned home last night."

"Good!"

Felix Main coughed.

"Mine was an interesting visit in many ways," he continued. "I may tell you at once that I have come to the conclusion that the affair is not nearly so simple a one as it appeared when Drayton was brought before the magistrates and committed for trial."

"Not so simple," Andrew repeated, a little uneasily.

"Not by any means," was the detective's impressive declaration. "As a matter of fact, it has become necessary to deal with the matter on an entirely different basis. In the first place, I should like to have what I ought to have asked for on your first visit—a list of your guests that evening."

Andrew reflected.

"Well, we weren't a very full house," he confided. "There was Cotton, of course—Sir Richard Cotton —the criminal lawyer chap who's making all the trouble. There was my sister, Lady Susan Amagay,

Rodney Haslam, an old pal home on leave from West Africa, Manfield and his wife—Manfield's Lord Lieutenant of the county—Bobby Grindells—he's a young barrister—and a couple of fellows and a guest from the barracks who weren't staying in the house, but came over only for the evening. Wait a moment, there was the Doctor—Doctor Meadows—of course, and poor De Besset himself, the fellow who rushed in to warn my wife and got it from the burglar."

"What about those guests for the evening only?"

"Well, the soldier chaps were a Major Fraser and a Captain Philipson, and they brought over with them a young Russian, Prince Charles of Suess, I think his name was. Queer sort of lives those Russians seem to lead. I suppose they're hard up against it. That fellow De Suess, for instance, is dancing now as a professional at the Legation."

The detective had been scribbling on a piece of paper by his side.

"The five younger men of the party then," he remarked—"leaving out the Comte de Besset—were these two officers, Major Fraser and Captain Philipson, Prince Charles, Mr. Grindells and Mr. Haslam?"

"That's right," Andrew assented. "Roddie Haslam's no chicken, but I suppose he's round about forty."

"May I ask whether any one of these five was on particular terms of friendship with her ladyship?"

"With my wife?"

"Yes, with Lady Glenlitten."

"Haslam and she were rather pals," Andrew acknowledged, "but, as a matter of fact, all the rest were entire strangers to her. The two men from the barracks came over in response to a general invitation and had never been in the house before. Prince Charles was invited to dine at Mess with them that night, and they telephoned to ask if they could bring him. He too was a complete stranger to us all. Grindells was paying his first visit to the house since my marriage."

The detective paused to scratch his chin thoughtfully.

"Were either or any of these young men acquainted with De Besset?" he enquired.

Glenlitten considered the matter for a moment.

"Only Haslam. They saw something of each other at Deauville, where we were all staying."

"Were they on friendly terms?"

"Now that you come to mention it," Andrew admitted, "I don't think they were, particularly. You see, Haslam was rather an old-fashioned sort of a chap, and before De Besset turned up, he and my wife and I spent a lot of time together. De Besset's people lived down in the part of France my wife came from. He was more her age, spoke her language, and was keen on all the games she liked. He had a yacht too, and a box at the races, and generally made things very pleasant for us. He was very

civil to Haslam, but of course it wasn't quite the same thing."

"So that there was a certain amount of bad blood between Haslam and De Besset?" Felix Main surmised.

"I shouldn't say that it amounted to that," his client objected. "Haslam is a queer fellow, of course, as these colonial administrators who've been alone for long periods of time sometimes are, but I'm sure he'd no animosity towards De Besset—irritation occasionally perhaps."

"Prince Charles danced a good deal with your wife that night, I believe."

"He may have done," was the indifferent reply. "In fact, now I come to think of it, I am sure he did. I remember my wife saying how well he danced. As you know, however, she was all in that night, and as soon as our principal guests had departed, she went upstairs and left my sister in charge."

The little man leaned back in his chair. He took off his gold *pince-nez* and swung them upon the cord. He was not at all a pleasant-looking person. There was a cunning gleam in his weak and watery eyes. Andrew, watching him idly, reflected how thoroughly he conformed to the popular idea of the sneak detective.

"You will forgive me, my lord, if I speak plainly," he begged. "We are on a serious subject and we can't get at the truth if we mince words."

"Good heavens, yes, man," his client assented with

some impatience. "Say whatever you want to."

"You have never noticed anything in the shape of a flirtation between your wife and De Besset, or Haslam, or Prince Charles?"

Glenlitten laughed softly; he had expected a more disconcerting question.

"Not likely!" he replied. "As I told you, my wife had never met Prince Charles before these fellows brought him over that night. We saw a good deal of De Besset at Deauville, but I'm afraid you'll have to take my word for it that my wife isn't that sort at all. She had a very quiet time in France before I married her, shut up with a dour old lady, and she is only just beginning to realise what amusement is. She's naturally light-hearted and gay, but every one whom she likes at all she treats in the same way. As for dear old Roddie Haslam, why, I've never known him address a serious word to a woman in my life. He could have got a much better job, as a matter of fact, if only he'd been a married man, but he wouldn't face it at any price."

Mr. Felix Main had a peculiar habit of relapsing into short silences during which he kept his eyes averted from his client and scribbled meaningless things upon the paper by his side. Andrew began to get annoyed.

"Tell me what you're driving at, Mr. Main?" he insisted. "You haven't been stumbling into any mare's-nest down at Glenlitten, I hope?"

"No, I don't think so," was the cautious reply.

"I have conducted all my enquiries with the utmost circumspection, and the few people who knew of my presence in the neighbourhood believed that I was working on behalf of the police. I have gone so far, however, Lord Glenlitten, as to assure myself of this," the detective continued, speaking more slowly and with his eyes furtively fixed upon his client—"there is an impression amongst the servants that when De Besset left to go to his room that night—a very unfortunate departure that of his—he was followed by one of the other young gentlemen."

"Well, that doesn't seem to lead us anywhere in particular," Andrew observed, a little puzzled.

"De Besset's room, as you know, would be only three doors from her ladyship's boudoir," Mr. Felix Main went on. "I think it was understood at the inquest—in fact, it was proved by the fact that De Besset was able to reach her ladyship's bedchamber—that the communicating doors between her sitting-room, bathroom, and bedroom were unlocked. It would therefore have been quite easy for the young man who followed De Besset, whoever he may have been, to have concealed himself in Lady Glenlitten's room whilst the Comte de Besset was visiting his own bedchamber."

"But why on earth should he?" Andrew demanded. "If you're thinking of Roddie Haslam, he's the shyest man on earth. If he found himself in a lady's bedroom even by accident, he'd have a fit."

"I have been working upon the theory you yourself passed on to me, that there was a third person in Lady Glenlitten's room who shot De Besset," the detective explained, glancing up at the dusty ceiling.

"But that wasn't my theory at all," Andrew declared angrily. "It is precisely the theory I engaged you to demolish. I looked upon it as perfectly ridiculous. It is Cotton's asinine idea, evolved because it is the only one which could save his precious burglar's skin."

"Sir Richard Cotton," Felix Main pronounced slowly, "is a very shrewd man. Without a doubt, he has some evidence in the background which he has not as yet divulged. I have come to the conclusion, Lord Glenlitten, that he is probably right in his theory that a third person, as yet not mentioned, was somehow concerned with the affair. My enquiries have narrowed the thing down to this—that third person could not have been Major Fraser or Captain Philipson or Mr. Grindells, because there is evidence that they did not leave the lounge. Therefore it must either have been the gentleman you call Haslam or the Russian young gentleman with whom her ladyship had been dancing so much."

Andrew considered the question for a moment. He was looking, for him, unusually serious.

"To make your theory feasible," he pointed out, "the young man would have had to enter my wife's

sitting room, pass through her bathroom, and conceal himself in her bedroom whilst she herself was in one of these three apartments."

The detective was hard at work with his pen, his eyes fixed upon the desk.

"It would seem so," he assented, "unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless he had entered her ladyship's room by the door opening from the corridor or through your apartments."

"You are suggesting an impossibility," Andrew pointed out coldly. "It was proved at the inquest that both doors were locked."

Mr. Felix Main relapsed into one of his meditative fits.

"They were discovered to be locked after the tragedy," he ventured presently. "It would have been possible, however, you see, for any one to have entered through either door and locked it afterwards on the inside."

"You are not suggesting this seriously, I trust?" Andrew asked, a very ominous note creeping into his tone.

"At this stage," Mr. Felix Main assured him hastily, "I am making no serious suggestions—just feeling around. Let me ask you this, though? Was it usual for her ladyship's door opening out on to the corridor, and for the door communicating with your apartments, to be locked?"

"Most unusual," Andrew admitted.

"Can you suggest any reason why this should have been the case upon that particular night?"

"Her ladyship may have locked them, hearing my servant in my room and thinking that he might come in to talk to her maid. You see, she retired rather early, and my man would imagine that it was Annette moving about and not her ladyship."

Felix Main nodded.

"That's quite a plausible theory," he agreed, "and one which will have to be taken account of. I have explained to your lordship now," he went on, "just how far I have gone. Am I to proceed with my investigations? If so, I shall now devote myself to studying the lives and habits of two men—Mr. Rodney Haslam and the young Russian gentleman, Prince Charles of Suess."

His head was once more bent. Andrew took out a cigarette and lit it. His fingers were not altogether steady.

"Anything of that sort would be sheer waste of time," he declared. "I am much obliged to you for what you've done, although you haven't worked along exactly the lines I wished. Let me have your account as soon as you like and I'll square it up. I've come to the conclusion it's better to let Sir Richard and the police deal with the matter their own way."

"I think for the sake of your lordship's peace of mind," the other rejoined, "you are probably wise."

Glenlitten stared at him.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

"Ah, well!" Felix Main explained evasively, "one never knows where these investigations may lead. One might discover things about one's friends one would rather not know. I take it then that you wish to let the matter drop?"

"Those are my instructions," was the stern command.

"Unless, of course," the detective concluded, as his client rose to his feet, "something turned up which altered the whole complexion of the affair, something more definite than anything we have yet stumbled across. In that case I take it that you would rather I communicated with you than—say with the police?"

Andrew had recovered his nonchalance.

"Communicate with me or the police, whomever you like," he replied indifferently. "Both her ladyship and I are only too anxious that the full truth should be known."

Andrew dismissed his car and walked all the way to his club. He felt the need of fresh air. Arrived there, he washed, without any particular reason for doing so, and ordered a double whisky and soda. An acquaintance chaffed him upon the size of his drink.

"Had to have it," he confided. "I've been talking to a dirty little bounder who poisoned the very air around. I had to walk two miles, stick my head under a tap, and now here goes for the double drink, to get

rid of the germs of him. Hope I never see or hear from the fellow again."

But that was not altogether Mr. Felix Main's idea.

CHAPTER XIV

"Mrs. Drayton, the young person who wished to see you, my lady," Parkins announced, with discreet reserve. He did not in the least approve of his mistress's good-natured, but somewhat tiresome habit of seeing every one who enquired for her, whether they were mendicants, vendors of new and amazing commodities, or representatives of charitable organizations.

Félice sat up on the sofa and motioned her visitor to a seat.

"Forgive me that I do not rise," she begged. "I have been sleeping and I am still very lazy."

Mrs. Drayton sat primly upon the edge of her chair and looked cautiously towards the door which the butler, who had announced her, was in the act of closing. She was dressed in severe black and with great neatness, but her hair was bobbed, and of that violent shade of auburn, a little blacker towards the roots, which even the least sophisticated of mortals accepts with some slight hesitation. Her complexion had that tired look which comes with the sudden and complete cessation of all cosmetics. She had bold dark eyes, just now judiciously lowered—a woman of about thirty-five years of age, hard to place.

"You are very kind to see me, my lady," she acknowledged. "Did you happen to remember my

name—to know who I was?" she added, a little wistfully.

"Let me see—Mrs. Drayton, was it not?" Félice reflected. "No, I am afraid I did not remember it. Have you been to see me before? It is some charity, perhaps?"

The woman shook her head.

"In a way it is charity, my lady, for which I have come to beg, but not for money. I am the wife of Max Drayton, who broke into your house in Hampshire in the hope of stealing your necklace."

Félice sat up with a start.

"His wife!" she exclaimed. "You are that man's wife? The man who climbed up the ladder—I can see him now with his knee upon the window sill of my room—you say that you are his wife?"

"Yes, my lady," the woman assented, with something which closely approached a snivel. "You see, there are all sorts of us in the world, but after all we're all human beings. I didn't come here to talk about myself. Max was a sneak thief when I married him, and I knew it—I wasn't much better myself."

"I am sorry," Félice murmured vaguely.

"I haven't come to beg him off for the burglary," his wife went on. "Wouldn't be any use, I suppose, if I had. It was a fair cop, and he hadn't even got rid of the ring. They tracked him by the car, and the magistrate didn't want anything but the police evidence to send him for trial. But, my lady—"

"Well?"

"There was a man killed that night."

"Yes," Félice assented with a shudder. "Do I not know?"

"My Max didn't kill him," the woman declared, raising her voice a little.

Félice made no reply. She was seated with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon her visitor.

"My Max," the latter continued emphatically, "has never packed a gun in his life. He began as a sneak thief, and sneak burglar is what he's become, but he doesn't even carry a jimmy. He's never shown fight yet, as the police can testify. He's as light on his feet, and as artful as they make 'em, and he goes for a get-away all the time. So would any burglar who's got any sense. It's a few years with hard labour for burglary without violence, my lady, but you may get a lifer if you use a gun. Max isn't that sort of fool, anyway. He loves his life and liberty, same as you and me."

"Why have you come here to tell me this?"

"Because your ladyship was in the room, because some one must know that it wasn't my Max who fired the shot, and you were there."

"I was there," Félice acknowledged, "but the whole place was in darkness. I could see nothing. It was terrifying. They found out afterwards that some one had tampered with the cable in the engine room."

"Max may have been in that," his wife admitted. "That's an old trick of his. He loves to work in the dark. He carries an electric torch, of course, and if

no one can turn a light on him, he's got so much the better chance of a get-away, but, my lady, some one was killed in your bedroom whilst my Max had his knee on your window sill. When he heard the gun go off, he pretty near tumbled down, and if he had he'd have broken his neck. Instead of coming into the room for the necklace he was after, he just pinched one ring and hopped it."

"But the necklace is missing too," Félice reminded her.

"I can't help that," the woman replied doggedly. "Max didn't take it. He ain't ever denied the burglary, he ain't denied being there. He owned up the moment he was copped, and the story I'm telling you now is the gospel truth. He pinched the ring, and he legged it, and whoever shot that man in your room it wasn't him. That's what I've come to say, my lady, and I've come to ask for your kind help."

The camouflage of the woman's restrained toilette and manner was slowly disappearing. Her voice had become harsher and louder. She pushed her hat a little back, and there were pools of fear in her black eyes. Her mouth had developed almost an animal curve. She was a she-wolf fighting for her own. Félice looked at her with a shiver. A new fear was in her heart.

"But I did not know that your husband was charged with killing the Comte de Besset," she said.

"That's the cunning of the police," the woman explained. "They've got him committed for trial

on a charge of burglary. They'll keep him in prison all right whilst they work up the other case. We've got the best lawyer in the world. My Max is a saving man, and we ain't paupers, although it's taking every penny we have in the world. The police are going round now all the time looking for evidence. They won't find it too easy. They'll never be able to swear to finding a gun on my Max, though they may try. He ain't never owned such a thing, and if they'd only let me go in the box I could swear to that if God's lightning were hovering over my head, but after all it's your ladyship could settle it. You didn't see my husband shoot the poor gentleman, my lady."

"I did not see anything," Félice assured her. "The darkness came just as the man—your husband, I suppose—was getting in at the window, and stretched out his hand towards the dressing table."

There was a pause. The woman fidgeted nervously with the edge of her jacket.

"Anyway you ain't going to say you saw my Max fingering a gun?" she demanded.

"How could I? I told you before that I could see nothing."

Again there was a silence. The woman was nervous but determined.

"Your ladyship must have known—that there was some one else in the room."

Félice gave a little gasp.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Some one shot that poor gentleman," the woman pointed out. "They're trying to fix it on my Max, but it wasn't him. Now this is what I call reason. If it wasn't Max, it was some one else who was in the room, and if there was any one else in the room, your ladyship must have known. That's fair, ain't it?"

Félice's voice seemed even to her to be coming from a long way off. It was very still and very quiet.

"You are suggesting that there was a man concealed in my bedroom with my knowledge who shot the Comte de Besset?"

"My lady, it's common sense," the woman argued stubbornly. "There was a man there; and how could he have got in unless you knew. You may not like to own up to it, and I don't blame you, but it's no crime after all, and you're a human being enough not to want the wrong man to swing rather than tell the truth. It's the sort of thing goes on every day with us folk," she continued brazenly, "and to judge from the divorce cases in high life we read of at times, I don't know as it's very different in yours. I'm putting it to your ladyship straight. If you're keeping a still tongue in your head because you don't want your husband to know of your goings on, well, I say that's all right, and good luck to you, but when it comes to an innocent man being hung for what your fancy chap might have done, you're a woman like the rest of us, and you couldn't let that be. No, my lady, you couldn't let that happen. Sit up and say yer couldn't. I expect I'm as fond of my man in my way

as you are of yours, though mine's a burglar and yours is a marquis or something; still, they're both of them men and human beings. The war's taught us there ain't so much difference, after all. I say again, my lady, you ain't going to let my man swing."

Félice rose slowly to her feet and stood upon the hearthrug by the side of the sofa—a strange, pathetic-looking little figure, though in a way there was a great dignity in her bearing. She looked at her visitor without expression, without any trace of anger.

"I have listened to you very patiently, Mrs. Drayton," she said. "I shall remember every word. So far as I can help you in any way, I will. I do not believe that your husband killed the Comte de Besset; therefore I shall try to establish your husband's innocence. Apart from that you are very gravely wrong. My husband is as dear to me as yours to you, and all those things which you have suggested are offensive to me and wicked. You will please go away now. I shall remember all that you have said."

The woman was disturbed. She felt a power behind that small presence which puzzled her. She sought in her mind for means to placate it. The situation had appeared simple enough to her when she came yet her exposition of it seemed to have raised an opposing force with which she had no idea how to deal.

"You will forgive me if I have given offence, my

lady," she begged awkwardly. "It is my man, you know, I want to save. He's delicate too. A long time in prison would kill him sure enough, just the same as though they hung him."

"I quite understand," Félice assented, pressing the bell. "I have no doubt, Mrs. Drayton, that you will succeed in saving him. I am not an Englishwoman, but they tell me that in this country one very seldom suffers unjustly."

"Your ladyship's not angry?" the woman pleaded, as she rose hesitatingly to her feet.

"You have given me no cause for anger," was the grave reply. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Drayton. You have my best wishes, as you shall have my best efforts on your husband's behalf."

The woman passed out, the door closed behind her. Félice resumed her seat. A queer and direful flood of fancies seized upon her in those few minutes of tension. The room seemed suddenly dark. She imagined that she could hear again the sharp report, the heavy fall, the groan, the gurgle in the man's throat as he died.

CHAPTER XV

Mrs. Drayton had not very long taken her leave when Annette arrived with the discreet announcement which her mistress had been anticipating with a certain amount of dread.

"The young gentleman for the dancing lessons, milady. I fancy he called himself Prince something or other, but I couldn't quite catch the name."

"You can show him into the music room," Félice directed. "See that the gramophone is in order."

She changed her slippers and made her somewhat reluctant way downstairs. Charles was trying over a record when she entered, and, although his greeting was entirely correct, she found herself shivering as, with a little bow, he came forward to meet her. He was sleek and well-groomed as ever, but more and more, every time they met, she was conscious of something sinister in his manner, something which inspired her all the time with a vague sense of uneasiness.

"So my little sister has not forgotten," he said. "Good! What shall we start with? A tango?"

She was curiously anxious to delay the moments of greater familiarity entailed by the dance.

"You would like some tea first?"

"Thank you, no," he answered promptly. "Some brandy or a cocktail."

She glanced at the clock.

"For that," she told him, "you must wait until

afterwards. I can scarcely order things of that description whilst I have my dancing lesson. Proceed, if you please, but remember, Charles, I am doing this for the sake of paying you your fee. Make the lesson as short as possible."

"How cruel, little sister," he mocked, as they began, "and you dance so nicely too! Indeed, it is very much pleasanter to dance with you than these old ladies who expect so much for their guineas."

"We will talk, if you please, as little as possible," she suggested. "It is a habit of mine when dancing."

He laughed mirthlessly, but obeyed.

"You are a little slow upon that turn," he criticised, when the tune was finished. "You would do better to lean a little more towards me."

"I prefer my own way," she rejoined.

He lit a cigarette and began to search through the records. Félice frowned.

"Do you mind not smoking until the lesson is over," she requested.

"And why not?"

Her eyes flashed.

"You come here as my dancing instructor. It is your own wish that our relationship should not be disclosed. Very well, you must behave as my dancing instructor."

"A great lady, our little sister has become all at once," he scoffed. "Very well, she must be humoured, but after the lesson is over, I presume I may be received as an ordinary person."

"After the lesson is over, I have a few words to say to you," she announced. "Then you shall have what entertainment you desire."

He looked at her with an unpleasant gleam in his eyes.

"More serious talk, eh? Félice, I do not enjoy serious talk with you. You are prettier when you laugh. Sometimes when I look at you and think of sister Anna, I wonder how anything as charming as you found its way into our family. You are much admired in London, they tell me."

"We will dance, if you please," she proposed icily.

He selected a fresh record, after which, without a moment's pause, she pressed another upon him.

"Now one more tango," she decided, "and I think we may consider the lesson at an end."

"I am thirsty," he complained.

"Afterwards."

A spice of malice led her to protract the last dance. She even asked his advice about some of the steps. When they had finished, she rang the bell. Charles demanded brandy and Perrier, which was promptly brought.

"And now, dear Félice, the fee, please," he begged, holding out his hand. "Five guineas is as little as I can come for."

She handed it to him. He stooped down.

"And a little sisterly kiss?"

She drew away, fighting against the revulsion which she felt must show itself in her face.

"Charles," she reminded him, "you and the family have decided for yourselves what our terms should be. I am used to them now. I have found all the affection I want in the world and I am happy with it. I need nothing else and prefer to be without it."

He scowled down at her.

"I shall hope in time," he said, "to see you become a little less severe."

"Nothing of the sort will happen with me," she assured him. "Now I have a serious word to say to you."

"Then let us sit down," he pleaded. "I was dancing until six o'clock this morning, and I slept ill."

They seated themselves side by side on one of the long divans which bordered the far side of the room. Charles dealt generously with his brandy and soda.

"I wish to refer once more," she began, "to what I said to you the other afternoon. No, don't look like that, Charles. It is quite necessary. There is a very terrible ordeal before me, and I wish to prepare for it."

"There is no ordeal at all unless you make it one," he rejoined angrily.

"You are mistaken. Now listen to me, Charles. You know already the story which Max Drayton, the burglar, tells."

"I learned it from you."

"His story is that directly he heard the shot and saw De Besset fall, he was so terrified that he scuttled away for his life."

"Pooh! That is what he says. Who will believe such a tale?"

"I am terribly afraid that I do," was the grave rejoinder.

"Then get such foolish ideas out of your head," he insisted savagely. "De Besset was shot by the burglar. If they haven't traced the necklace, it's the fault of the police. He has it somewhere."

"Charles," she asked him, "why are you suddenly so prosperous? Paul tells me that you have plenty of money, that you have given up your room in Milden Square. He thinks that you are staying in an hotel."

The young man was a little taken aback.

"I made some money at the races," he explained. "A woman too—a woman I dance with at the Legation—gave me some for selling her motor car."

Félice was silent for several moments. Her mind had travelled back to the old days when she was a child. She tried to recall herself with her English and French governesses. And the others—there were such a crowd of them always, such shadowy, vague figures. Charles? Yes, she remembered him—a tall, gawky youth who had shown signs of growing up like this. She had hated him because she had seen him beat one of the outdoor servants. That was almost the sum total of her recollection of him.

"Charles," she said, forcing herself back to the present, "we will leave the necklace alone for a moment. I just want you to recall that night. I am

going to speak of the thing which we have avoided. You told me when we were dancing that you were in terrible trouble. You said that you must see me alone in my sitting room for a few minutes. It was for that reason that I left my guests and went to bed early."

He drank off the whole remaining contents of his tumbler at a gulp. Before he spoke, he helped himself again to brandy and mixed with it a very little Perrier water.

"Why do you drag all this up?" he demanded.

"I must understand it clearly. You came to my sitting room, and you began to tell me about this money which you owed and the chance that you might get into serious trouble if it were not paid. In the middle of it all we heard some one come along the corridor and stop outside my door. I suppose we lost our heads. I waved you away. You disappeared into my bathroom; so far as I know, I saw no more of you that night."

"You lost your head, as most women do," he grumbled. "There was no harm in my being in your sitting room—I—your brother."

"Then why didn't you tell every one, or allow me to tell them that you were my brother?" she retorted swiftly. "Then you could have done just as you liked. It was simply because you have made me pledge my word to this secrecy that we are always in such trouble. It is intolerable, the situation which you force upon me."

"It is not for my sake, it is for the sake of the others," was his almost passionate insistence. "Our family has many enemies, Félice, and some of them are in London at the present moment. That any of us escaped alive was a miracle. I do not think," he went on, with an unpleasant smile, "that there is a family in Russia more hated than ours."

She sighed.

"I begin to wonder sometimes," she confessed, "whether we have not deserved it. But that is not what I wish to talk of at this moment. I have promised to say nothing about any of you and so far I have kept my word. It has been very difficult and I warn you that a time may come when I shall break that promise."

"If you do," he cried—

"Whenever it pleases you," she interrupted, "we will speak of that matter. At present there is something different. There is something which I must tell you, because it is on my mind night and day."

He helped himself to a cigarette with trembling fingers. Apparently he forgot to light it.

"When that shot was fired," she went on, dropping her voice until it sunk to a whisper, vibrant with terrible emotion, "one of the burglar's hands was upon the window sill, and the other was gripping my ring. Therefore, I know that the burglar did not fire that shot. They are going to try to hang him for it, Charles. What am I to do?"

"What you have to do is plain enough," he mut-

tered savagely. "You are beside yourself with fear even now. I do not know what you are talking about. Forget it. You fainted. Why not?"

"But I did not faint until afterwards, Charles," she persisted, "and I saw the burglar's two hands when the shot was fired, and there was no gun in them. Now, who shot Raoul de Besset, Charles?"

"The burglar," was the furious retort. "No one in their senses will ever doubt it."

"The burglar whose two hands I saw at the time when the shot was fired," she repeated—"the burglar who even the police admit they have never known to carry a gun? Where were you, Charles, when the shot was fired?"

He helped himself to more brandy with a trembling and lavish hand.

"Downstairs, dancing," he insisted. "You do not suppose I would let any one find me in your room? I couldn't say that we were brother and sister. I had to get you out of it. I went through your bathroom and bedroom and out on to the corridor, met not a soul on the stairs, came in through the winter garden, and I was dancing before any one even knew that I had been away for those few minutes. I danced with your sister-in-law—Lady Susan. They'll all tell you the same story."

"I have no doubt they will," she admitted, "and yet it is not the truth. When the people rushed up, they had to come through my bathroom because I had locked the door of my bedroom and of Andrew's

room, so that no one should know that you were in my sitting room whilst we were talking. How could you get out through that door, Charles, and lock it again on the inside?"

"I unlocked it and went out that way," he declared stubbornly. "You must have locked it again when you came in to bed."

"That I did not do."

He sat quite still for a moment. His manner was changed. He was becoming wickedly and dangerously quiet.

"Listen, little sister," he said, "you think more of that burglar than of me? You would like me to say that I shot De Besset."

"I should like you to tell me who else could have done it," she answered.

He scoffed at her.

"How do I know how many lovers you had locked up in your room?" he demanded. "The women of our family have never been over-squeamish, and that fellow Haslam, as well as De Besset, were both crazy about you. If it wasn't your pet burglar who killed De Besset, find the murderer for yourself. You can do it."

"I am terribly afraid that I have found him," she replied. "I believe that it was you, Charles."

He leaned forward and the long fingers of his hand were tense and quivering. She felt his arm around her waist. His strange-coloured eyes terrified her. His face drew nearer to hers. She could scarcely

make up her mind whether it was murder that was coming or some other terrible thing.

"Little sister," he whispered, "have you forgotten—"

The words seemed suddenly frozen upon his lips. Félice herself was absolutely incapable of movement. They both looked up. Andrew Glenlitten, smiling, well-groomed, with a great bunch of violets in his hand, had crossed the threshold. He closed the door carefully behind him. There was about his manner not the slightest shade of anger or embarrassment.

"Hope I'm not interrupting a specially interesting tête-à-tête," he said good-humouredly. "Fact is, I've brought Susan and a few of them in for a cocktail, and they're all clamouring for you, Félice. How are you, De Suess? Hope you'll come down and join us if the lesson's over. Smell these, my dear," he added, presenting the violets. "All home-grown. Last of the season, or first. I forget what they told me. Come along then. These fellows have got their tongues out for cocktails. I think you'll like our Martinis, De Suess."

He led the way with his arm affectionately around his wife's waist. Her heart was beating madly. She would have given anything in the world to have thrown her arms around his neck. She knew so well, as the young man who was following, half glum, half unnerved, also knew, that her husband was covering up as best he could that moment of drama into which he had stepped.

CHAPTER XVI

An interesting and cheerful little company were gathered together in the library of Glenlitten House, being served with cocktails from an enormous shaker. There was Lady Susan, up for the day to see her dressmaker, Haslam—a little gaunter than ever he seemed in his town clothes—fresh from an official call at the Colonial Office, Andrew Glenlitten himself, his brother, Philip Monteith, just back from a brief period of service at Gibraltar, and Sir Richard Cotton. At the sight of the latter, Charles perceptibly hesitated. It was too late for retreat, however. The little party were sitting around in an easy, lounging circle, but the lawyer changed his place at the first opportunity and crossed the room to where Charles and his host were exchanging rather strained amenities.

"Met you once before, I think, on a memorable occasion down at Glenlitten," Sir Richard remarked, addressing Charles. "Not a night we any of us care to remember very much, I am afraid."

"It was an unfortunate evening indeed," Charles assented. "For me it was quite an unexpected visit. I was to have dined with Major Fraser at his Mess, and he and his friend discovered that they were due to dine and dance at Glenlitten. They asked me to accompany them. It would have been a very charming evening but for its unfortunate close."

"You must try and forget that," Andrew said courteously, "and pay us a visit later on."

"Any news of the necklace?" Lady Susan enquired.

Sir Richard shook his head.

"Not up to the present," he admitted. "One ring is all we have managed to squeeze out of my poor client."

"An heirloom, that necklace, you know," Philip reminded them all gloomily. "Might have come to me some day if Andrew goes on living his present wild life. Are we insured, Andrew?"

"Don't ask impertinent questions, young fellow," was the good-humoured reply. "If you could only keep away from those cabaret shows, give Paris a rest for a time, and find some one like Félice, we'd see your wife had her diamond necklace all right."

Philip, who was a smaller edition of his brother, bronzed, with clear blue eyes and a little ruddy moustache, shook his head disconsolately.

"It's just because there isn't another girl in the world like Félice," he grumbled, "that I sometimes waste an hour or so at a cabaret, or fly over to Paris for a week-end. I'm beginning to believe in Eastern principles. No man who has such a treasure of a wife ought to exploit her to make other men jealous and envious."

"I do so love your family, Andrew," Félice murmured. "If only you had more brothers!"

"My dear," her husband confided, "our rent roll wouldn't stand it."

"Talking about rent rolls," Sir Richard intervened, "I was dining with the Chancellor of the Exchequer last night. He assures me that he has discovered a new way of taxing these vast inherited properties."

"This," Andrew declared, starting a second round with the cocktail shaker, "is the hour of peace. I am a man who has just lost a necklace worth thirty thousand pounds. My thoughts must be diverted."

Sir Richard turned towards his neighbour.

"Did you ever see this wonderful necklace?" he asked.

"On the night it was stolen," Charles replied. "Lady Glenlitten wore it for the earlier part of the evening. Then, unfortunately, as it chanced, she left us. I make enquiries often, and I read sometimes the English newspapers, but I imagine that the history of the great theft which followed remains to be written."

"I read in one Sunday paper," Philip remarked, "that the burglar who pinched it has got consumption. If the diamonds have to lie by until he comes out after he's done his sentence, wreaths on his grave are the only good the necklace will be to him."

"He will have a widow," Sir Richard surmised. "They all have widows. I hope she pays her death duties, and the Crown will at least get something back."

"It occurs to me," their host complained, lighting a cigarette, "that you are all unnecessarily flippant about this subject. I am the bereaved person. I am not at all sure that the law will not compel me to make good the loss of this necklace for the benefit of my descendants."

"Let me wave the torch of hope," Sir Richard suggested. "I still maintain that the necklace will be traced. Every outlet for precious stones in Europe —and India for that matter—is being watched. No one will dare offer the more famous of the gems just yet. Your time may come, Andrew. As for my man, I simply don't believe he's got it. I have defended him three times before on various charges, and although of course he is a thief by instinct, whatever story he may put up elsewhere, he has always told me the truth."

"The whole affair is very simple," Philip declared. "If Sir Richard's burglar hasn't got the necklace, one of you fellows who were in the house at the time must have. Haslam has a guilty look about him, but I rather suspect Andrew. Have you put in your insurance claim yet, Andrew? Remember it's a criminal affair if you're found with the stuff afterwards."

They were all intimates, chaffing without fear of misunderstanding. Even Haslam smiled grimly as he offered his bank book for inspection. Several courteous attempts were made to draw the Russian a little further into the circle. It was obvious that he only

half understood the general tone. He drank cocktails with unfailing resolution, but the persistent badinage was beyond him. Lady Susan who had taken rather a fancy to the grave but somewhat disturbed-looking young man, led him through the folding doors into the library proper to show him some Russian treasures which had been brought home by her grandfather.

"A fine figure of a young man, that," Sir Richard remarked thoughtfully, as he watched the two disappear. "I wonder how he got out of Russia."

"He told me that night at Glenlitten," Haslam confided, "that he had been taken prisoner early in the war by the Austrians. It was touch and go for the rest of the family, I believe."

"Damned hard luck on some of these fellows!" the lawyer reflected. "I wonder whether he has anything to live on."

"Well, one sees him about at places where the money is in evidence," Philip commented.

"Your night haunts, I suppose you mean," his brother suggested.

"I don't see why you should saddle me with the shadow of your past dissipations," Philip grumbled, "just because you have had the luck to marry the *only* girl worth marrying in the world. Still, the fellow is rather a frequenter of night clubs."

"Why shouldn't he be?" Andrew rejoined. "He makes a living out of it. He's a professional dancer at the Legation—started last week."

"Jolly plucky thing to do," Philip approved. "If a fellow's a good dancer and got no money, why on earth shouldn't he make a bit at it?"

"Have you ever met him in what the journalists would call 'Society'?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Not very often," Philip admitted. "He's got one or two pals who are rather a warm lot at cards, and I saw him once in a *chemie* dive."

Andrew, who was walking around with the cocktail shaker, pointedly avoided his brother.

"Do you mean to say," he asked sternly, "that you would run the risk of bringing disgrace upon our name by being discovered in such a place?"

"Only as Mr. Moses Brown," Philip declared, holding out his glass wistfully. "And I assure you, Andrew, that every time I have been in a night club that has been raided, or on the one or two occasions when I have been in a *chemie* hold-up, it has been as Mr. Moses Brown."

"The name is becoming familiar to me from the police sheets," Sir Richard confided. "I shall give them a hint at Scotland Yard."

Philip looked across at him in a hurt manner.

"And I thought that in the house of his friends, even the lawyer had a sense of humour," he groaned. "This should be sanctuary. Thank you, Andrew," he added, as his brother filled his still extended glass. "We must have an understanding with Sir Richard. This is the place and hour when I usually confess to

a crime or two, but I can't be myself if official notice is to be taken of my candour."

"Awfully good thing for our dispositions," Andrew suggested, "if for ten minutes every day we confessed our crimes and told the truth—had a heart-to-heart settling up with our consciences, as it were."

"I should choose the ten minutes of solitude before slipping into my innocent couch," Philip decided promptly.

"The most crowded ten minutes of your day, it would be," his brother chuckled.

"Next time you stay at Glenlitten," Félice warned him, "I shall come and listen."

"Over my dead body," her husband declared. "At any cost, child, you must be spared the knowledge of what human depravity can sink to."

"Now is a good time for our ten minutes' confession," Sir Richard proposed suddenly. "Who pinched the Glenlitten necklace?"

"And whilst we're about it," Haslam put in with portentous unexpectedness, "who shot poor De Besset?"

A curious change seemed to flash into the atmosphere of the room. A few seconds before, its guiding spirit had been that of good-natured chaff. Personalities had been freely indulged in, every one had been entirely and completely at his ease. Now for some reason or other they had all become tongue-tied. An obvious embarrassment reigned. No one at-

tempted a light-hearted reply, no one ventured upon a mock confession. Every one studied his neighbour's face, a little puzzled, wondering whence had come this sinister and alien influence. Then, as though by a common impulse, general attention was directed towards the folding doors, upon the threshold of which Lady Susan and Charles were standing. The young Russian, so graceful and debonair a few minutes before, seemed suddenly to have changed into the likeness of a half-brutal animal. His attitude was almost ferocious. There was something wolflike in the uplifting of his lips, a gleam of something malign and threatening in those steely eyes. One had the idea that he remained speechless through sheer incapacity. The whole episode was immeasurably brief, but it evolved its own peculiar sensation. Andrew himself broke the spell.

"Tabloid drama by famous criminal lawyer," he exclaimed. "Is this the French method of extorting a confession, Dick? I nearly fell on my knees."

The moment had passed. Charles was dabbing his lips with an over-perfumed, cambric handkerchief. The cynosure still of that little circle of eyes, he understood that some explanation was necessary.

"I follow your language, perhaps, yet with some difficulty," he explained, in a distinctly unnatural voice. "I did not quite understand."

"Sir Richard has no enunciation," Andrew declared. "Bites at his words all the time. What can you expect of a race of professional men who pro-

nounce the simple words 'My Lord'—'M'lud'?"

Sir Richard smiled gravely, but with a curious little gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"I was perhaps to blame," he acknowledged, "for introducing what is after all a serious matter into a chaffing discussion."

The butler reappeared for the second time with a replenished cocktail shaker. Every one began to talk at once, but long before the fresh supply was consumed the little company had drifted away, and Glenlitten and Félice were left alone in the deserted room, Félice sank exhausted into an easy-chair, and for the first time a strange new feeling, almost of fear, crept into her heart as she watched her husband select a cigarette from the box and light it.

"Sensitive, passionate lot, some of your people," he observed, in his usual good-humoured tone. "I thought your dancing master was going to spring at us all a few minutes ago."

Félice attempted an indifferent reply, although the grizzly fingers of fear were drawing at her heart strings.

"I think he did not quite understand," she said. "You see all our—is it not chaff, you call it?—is so personal. I, too, found it difficult at first to know when any one was in earnest. Now," she concluded, "I think I understand."

The dressing bell sounded and they moved towards the door, his arm around her waist.

"I don't believe I'm very clever," he admitted, "at

sizing up people of different nationalities, but there is one person in the world whom it makes me happy to know that I do understand, and that is you! Clever chap, aren't I, when there isn't a drop of Anglo-Saxon blood in you?"

"You are cleverer even than you know, dear Andrew," she whispered.

CHAPTER XVII

Mrs. Max Drayton, in the seclusion of her drawing-room, was rather a shock to her unexpected visitor. She had kicked off one shoe, and there was a visible hole in her thin silk stocking. Her *negligée* robe did little to conceal underclothes of somewhat violent hue, and her unrestrained hair more frankly than ever acknowledged the cruder arts of the coiffeur. She started to her feet, as Félice was ushered in by the untidy serving maid, and laid her cigarette upon an ash tray.

"Why—my lady!" she gasped. "I wasn't expecting you, down here!"

Félice smiled as pleasantly as she could.

"I was obliged to come and see you, Mrs. Drayton," she explained. "There is bad news which I think you should be told. I have seen your husband's lawyer, and I know now that what we spoke of and feared might happen on your last visit is actually coming to pass. Your husband will be charged with the murder of the Comte de Besset."

The woman lost all her awkwardness in a storm of passion.

"Blast them!" she cried, clenching her hands until the finger nails bit into her flesh. "I knew they'd do it—the brutes! They'll lay it on to him if they can do it—blast them!"

"Sit down," Félice begged. "We must talk about this quietly."

"Quietly!" the woman shrieked. "Could you talk about it quietly if it was your husband or your fancy man they'd got hold of? I know 'em, these cops. They've got no conscience. They gets hold of a man like my Max, who's got what they call a shady past, and sooner than confess they can't catch the right one, they'll do him in. All criminals are alike to them—a sneak thief or a murderer. It's the job of the police to get some one to swing, and they ain't squeamish how they do it."

"I do not think that it is quite as bad as that," Félice expostulated. "Your husband is to be charged, but that does not mean for certain that he will be found guilty. You must remember that there are a judge and jury to be convinced."

"What are you going to do about it, my lady?" the woman demanded. "Now then! We're fair up against it, both of us. If it wasn't my man who fired that shot, maybe it was yours, and you know it. Sympathy's all very well. Are you going to let my man hang?"

"Certainly I am not if I can help it," Félice assured her. "Do please calm yourself. Should I have come here to talk to you if I had not wished your husband well?"

The woman sank reluctantly into a chair. Her fit of fury was passing. She covered her face with her hands and rocked back and forth, sobbing.

"It is a very terrible affair," Félice continued gently, "but, Mrs. Drayton, I do not think that your

husband will be found guilty. I have come here to tell you that so that you need not worry. May I ask for one of your cigarettes?"

The woman sat up and pushed the cardboard box across the table.

"They're only Three Castles, my lady," she apologised, dabbing at her eyes with an unwholesome-looking piece of cambric,—"not your class at all, I know, but maybe you won't mind for once."

"I will smoke one with pleasure," Félice declared, stretching out her hand. "Thank you. I think that Virginian tobacco is very agreeable for a change. . . . And now, I have several things to say to you, Mrs. Drayton. Promise me that you will not be offended."

"I don't mind anything," the woman replied, "so long as you ain't telling me that you're going to leave my Max in the lurch and swear you saw him do what he didn't."

"That I surely will not," Félice promised. "What I wanted to know was whether I could be of any use to you in the way of money. You told me that your husband was getting Sir Richard Cotton to defend him, and my husband tells me that Sir Richard gets very large sums for his work."

"That's true enough, my lady," was the doleful rejoinder. "Max has got a bit of money put away somewhere, but I don't rightly know where it is. Most of what we've got in the bank I've made over to Sir Richard, and there are the bills, of course,

and living. Mind you, Sir Richard's not a hard man," she acknowledged. "He'll take what you can afford, but the gentry's like us, after all. They don't care about working for nothing, and if it's going to be a matter of life and death one doesn't want to be stingy."

"I have spoken to my husband about this," Félice went on. "I have told him that notwithstanding anything any one can say, I do not believe that your husband killed the Comte de Besset. I asked him for some money for you and I have brought it with me—five hundred pounds. You must please let me leave it. It is my husband's wish as well as my own."

"It would come in very useful," the woman admitted, with a covetous gleam in her eyes. "What I should do, my lady, would be to give Sir Richard another two hundred and keep something in hand for expenses and such like. There's the counsel to pay, as well as Sir Richard, and he's got to have his down on the nail. Of course, if it was only the burglary, the counsel wouldn't amount to much, but if it gets to be a trial for murder, there's money expected."

"Any money that is required for your husband's defence shall be found," Félice promised. "And I wish you to hear me tell you this, Mrs. Drayton—everywhere was darkness at the time, as you know, but one gleam of light did show from the window, and I do not believe that it would have been possible for your husband to have fired off a pistol without

my seeing what he was doing. So listen. If it should be necessary, then I shall go into the box and tell that to the judge."

"God bless you, my lady!" the woman exclaimed, dabbing once more at her eyes.

"Furthermore," Félice continued, with a little tremor in her tone, "although you must not count too much upon this, I feel sure that Sir Richard honestly believes your husband innocent and that he has collected some quite important evidence himself."

The woman rose to her feet, still in a lachrymose state, crossed the room and unlocked a drawer in a writing desk. From what seemed to be a secret compartment she produced a ring, and, returning, handed it to her visitor.

"My lady," she said, "me and Max have lied, but we ain't going to lie to you. It was two rings that Max got hold of. One of them the police has; here's the other. I couldn't keep it after your ladyship's kindness, not if it was worth a thousand pounds."

Félice's eyes were lit with pleasure.

"But this is very kind of you," she acknowledged. "It is not a large stone, but it is such a favourite of mine. You see, I used it as a guard for my engagement ring. Do you mean that I am to have it back again?"

"That's what I do mean," the woman rejoined. "Max and me ain't always so particular. We're for collecting what we can in the world, but we don't

want anything of yours, and he'd feel the same way I know, if he were here—and I'm specially pleased if it was a favourite of yours, my lady."

"There was a reward offered," Félice ventured, a little doubtfully.

"You can't pay a reward to the wife of a thief who's returned what her husband's stolen," the woman interrupted bluntly. "I'm only sorry about the necklace, but you can take it from me, and it's God's truth—Max never had it."

"I am sure I believe you, Mrs. Drayton," Félice said, rising to her feet. "Perhaps it will turn up after all, some day. Now, I must go. I heard that your husband was to be charged with the murder and I felt that I must come and see you at once. I am sure that you need not worry. They shall not frighten me, and when I give my evidence I shall say that I do not believe it was possible for your husband to have shot the Comte de Besset. I shall say that, no matter whom else it may place in danger."

The tears were rolling down the woman's cheeks, playing havoc with her carefully prepared complexion.

"I'll never forget your goodness, my lady," she admitted humbly. "You're one of the right sort, and there ain't too many. You ain't English, of course?" she asked, a little timidly, as she opened the door.

"No. I am half Russian and half French."

"Now ain't that strange!" the woman exclaimed, as she led the way down the oilcloth-covered passage.

"You know my Max says all the time as there was some one else on the job that night, or else where's the necklace gone? And it's a Russian as Max told me he suspected."

"A Russian?" Félice repeated, with a sudden little catch in her throat. "Does your husband know the name or anything about him?"

"He don't know much," the woman confessed, "but there's a young fellow as he's sure was in some crooked business not long ago, and he saw him down near Glenlitten only the night before he took on the job, when he was having a look round. What with the poor French gentleman being shot, and the necklace missing, it's a dead cert that there was some one else prowling about. Sir Richard, he thinks so too, and he's a shrewd one. I only 'ope as it's no one as will bring trouble to your ladyship," she concluded, in a lower tone.

Félice's smile was easy and assured, but there was a chill feeling at her heart as she stepped out on to the pavement.

"I do not think there is any fear of that, Mrs. Drayton," she said. "My friends were all accounted for. The whole thing is very mysterious, of course. One feels only foolish when one tries to guess. Some day I hope that it will be cleared up, for all our sakes."

"It had better be," the woman at the gate muttered, with a momentary return of her sullen manner.

CHAPTER XVIII

Andrew, standing booted and spurred in the library of his town house two days later, frowned perceptibly as Mr. Felix Main was ushered in. His expression, as a rule, was almost too good-natured. He possessed one of those happy, benevolent countenances which invite the mendicant and are a living encouragement to the would-be applicant for philanthropic assistance. To Mr. Felix Main, however, he presented an altogether different appearance. He was tapping the side of his leg with his riding crop in most suggestive fashion when his guest was ushered in, and his expression was, to say the least of it, inhospitable. He nodded briefly and waited until the door was closed before he spoke.

"What do you want with me, Mr. Main?" he asked. "I told you that our business was finished—paid you and settled up."

The detective advanced a little farther into the room, carefully drawing off his gloves. There was a slight squirm of the shoulders as he moved. His manner, though humble in the extreme, seemed still to suggest the cloven foot.

"I am very sorry to intrude, Lord Glenlitten," he said. "Sorry indeed if my visit is in any way inopportune, but in connection with that little affair I looked into for you, certain developments have occurred—certain developments which I thought should be brought to your notice."

"Spit them out and have done with it then," Andrew invited. "You did your work well enough, I have no doubt, but I have come to the conclusion that I was an idiot to employ you. I have learnt all I wish to learn from the usual sources."

"All that you wish to learn, perhaps," Mr. Felix Main repeated softly, "yet not by any means all that there is to be learnt."

"Do I gather," Andrew enquired, "that, without my instructions, against my wishes, in fact, you have been pursuing further investigations into my affairs?"

Mr. Felix Main made no direct reply. Notwithstanding the fact that any sort of invitation had been lacking, he seated himself upon a hard leather chair. Andrew surveyed him as though he were some sort of natural curiosity.

"Your lordship would do better to treat me as a well-wisher," he suggested gently. "Such information as I have acquired I have acquired in your lordship's service."

The crop swung rhythmically backwards and forwards in the air.

"You ran it pretty fine last time, Mr. Main," Andrew observed. "I should recommend you to be very careful how far you go this morning. I am not in a very good temper. I have a great aversion to people who interfere in other people's business on their own account. Now remember, you're fully warned. If you have anything to say to me, say it at

your own risk. If you have a bill to present, present it, and so long as it doesn't savour to me of blackmail I may pay it. Otherwise I'm busy. It's a fine morning and I want to ride."

Mr. Main coughed.

"I shall not keep you very long from your morning's exercise. You stopped my investigations on your behalf in connection with the famous Glenlitten murder when I felt it my duty to tell you of some discoveries I made. Your wife, on her retirement that evening, was followed first by Prince Charles of Suess and afterwards by the unfortunate Comte de Besset, and, although I have not been able to trace his movements so definitely, at some time or another by Mr. Rodney Haslam."

"Well?" Andrew muttered—and if ever a monosyllable conveyed a warning, that one did.

"Prince Charles of Suess," the detective continued, "came to your house as a professed stranger to your wife, yet she had an interview with him in her boudoir that night, and when she was disturbed, the young man—disappeared. It was quite possible that he passed into your wife's bedroom. He may even have been there when the shot was fired which killed the Comte de Besset."

"Go on," Andrew invited, with deceitful calm.

Mr. Felix Main gained courage.

"This man, De Suess, the Russian," he confided, "is an impostor. He is a professional dancer at the Legation Club. He lives with a disreputable family

of Russians in Milden Square. Your wife has visited him there."

"Are you getting anywhere towards the end of your interesting disclosures?" Andrew enquired.

"To the end of my disclosures, yes," was the unsuspecting reply; "to the conclusions which may be derived from the information I have given you, no. To begin with—"

Mr. Felix Main was never quite certain how the rest happened. He felt something like a band of iron round his neck and a grip upon the nether part of his clothing which nothing in the world could have moved. Without hurry or signs of visible anger, he was carried squealing to the hall.

"Open the front door," Andrew ordered one of the footmen on duty. "Faugh! Why do I soil my hands upon this little brute! John, kick him out on to the pavement. If ever he shows his face near the place again, give him a hiding, or send for the police."

Mr. Felix Main picked himself up from the gutter. There were not many people, as it happened, to see his precipitate exit from the house in Curzon Street, but the few who were there thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle. A taxicab driver, scenting a fare, drew up to the kerbstone, and the aggrieved man stepped in.

"To the nearest police station," he gasped.

The chauffeur expostulated.

"I shouldn't if I were you, sir," he advised. "That

was Number eleven you came out of, wasn't it? Every one knows his lordship. You won't get anything out of a quarrel with him. Calm down a bit, sir, and give us another address. The pubs ain't open yet, but get a drop of something at your own house and think things over."

Mr. Felix Main was already beginning to think things over.

"Drive me," he directed, "to number nineteen Lincoln's Inn, the offices of Sir Richard Cotton."

"Going to have the law on him, are you?" the taxicab man meditated. "Well, perhaps you're right. You knows your own business, I suppose. Anyway, if you change your mind before you get there, just let me know."

And then, curiously enough, this investigator into other people's business did change his mind. From a pecuniary point of view, there was certainly nothing to be made out of Sir Richard Cotton. The very suggestion of the thing was dangerous. He again redirected the man and was driven to Milden Square. Now, for the first time, fortune began to favour him. Issuing from the house, clad with the utmost care and smoking a cigarette, was Charles. The detective accosted him.

"May I ask," he enquired, "if you are Prince Charles of Suess?"

The young man looked him up and down.

"Supposing I am," he rejoined, "what do you want with me?"

"I have business of some importance," Mr. Felix Main announced.

"I don't know you. What is your name?" was the suspicious query.

"My name is Felix Main. I am a detective and I have been interesting myself in the Glenlitten burglary case."

"The Glenlitten burglary," Charles repeated feebly. "I—I—but what has that to do with me?"

The detective avoided a direct reply.

"I was first commissioned," he confided, "to make certain enquiries concerning the case by no less a person than the Marquis of Glenlitten himself. Either he is a bigger fool than he seems, or it may be that I am a little cleverer than he imagined. Anyhow, I found out all that he wanted to know—and a little more. Yes, quite a little more!"

"What does it matter to me what you found out?" the young man demanded harshly.

"Later on," the detective begged. "Let me finish. The Marquis of Glenlitten has dismissed me from the case, but it is too late. I have found out too much. I thought of going to Sir Richard Cotton. I changed my mind. I came instead to you."

Charles was conscious of a sudden giddiness. He held on to the railings for a moment. Then he pointed to the taxicab.

"We can scarcely talk out in the street here," he said. "I was on my way to the Milan Hotel. If

you will drive there with me, you can tell me what you want to know."

Mr. Felix Main reëntered the taxicab, and the young man seated himself by his side.

"You may as well begin by telling me why you think your investigations would interest me. It is true I was in the house that night, but I was a complete stranger and brought over by some friends from the barracks. I have never been there before nor have I been there since."

"Quite in accord with my information," the detective murmured. "In fact, I think that I have been very fortunate. There have been several people down there making enquiries—Mr. Ames of Scotland Yard, who has quite a reputation, for one."

"But why," Charles demanded, "do you come to me?"

"Because," his companion rejoined, "I am the one man who has found out the truth about the Glenlitten case."

Charles pitched his cigarette out of the window. It might have appeared that he disliked the flavour of the tobacco, but the fact was his hand shook so that he could not hold it.

"The truth about the Glenlitten case?" he repeated in an undertone.

Felix Main watched him and was satisfied.

"The Marquis of Glenlitten employed me," he explained, "because he was convinced, like the rest of the world, that De Besset was shot by the burglar,

and he objected to investigations being made into the movements of his other guests that night. I speedily discovered, however, that it was Lord Glenlitten who was wrong and Sir Richard who was on the right tack."

"I am very much interested," Charles confessed, "yet it seems strange to me that I should be your confidant."

"You will understand presently," Felix Main assured him. "You were one of the guests there that night. You were one of the three men absent from the festivities for some time. The other two were the Comte de Besset and a Mr. Rodney Haslam."

"Who is that fellow Haslam?" Charles asked eagerly. "I did not like him. He never took his eyes off Lady Glenlitten. I think that he was no friend of De Besset's. Did you find out anything about him?"

Felix Main made no remark for several minutes. He leaned out of the window and directed the taxicab to his own office.

"We can talk more comfortably there," he observed to his companion. "It is very important, of course, to discover the murderer of the Comte de Besset—a great feather in one's cap to steal a march on these Scotland Yard men—but there is another very interesting matter. The Glenlitten diamond necklace is still missing—a necklace worth thirty thousand pounds. Even the half of that might make a man comfortable for the rest of his life."

The two occupants of the cab, as though by accident, exchanged glances.

"I call myself," Mr. Felix Main went on, a moment or two later, "a private detective. I have had many clients, but all of the same order. They have all come to me to discover by whom they have been robbed, wronged, or otherwise hurt. Now it has sometimes, in my thoughtful moments, surprised me that I have no clients from the other side of the street."

"What do you mean?" Charles asked, beginning to recover himself.

"If I," the other mused, "were a criminal and wished to commit a felonious action and escape the consequences of the law, I should without a doubt seek to avail myself of the services of some one in my own line of business. I should go to them and explain the circumstances either before or after the deed was committed. As you know, all confidences given to any one in my profession are inviolable."

"Go on," Charles begged. "This gets interesting."

"Who so well able to protect a criminal—for a consideration, of course—as the detective—the detective, I mean, who is a free lance and bound to no one? Who so capable of studying the situation and advising exactly as to the best means of averting suspicion? Who could be in a better position for safely disposing of the booty?"

The taxicab stopped outside Mr. Felix Main's office. The latter descended and waved his guest hospitably forward.

"Will you come upstairs and chat for half an hour?" he invited.

Charles hesitated for a moment, whilst the other paid the driver. Then he crossed the pavement and followed him through the portals of his unassuming office.

CHAPTER XIX

The first pheasant shoot took place at Glenlitten during the following week, and tragedy for the time passed into the background. The sport was good, and it was almost twilight when their host marshalled his guests to their places for the last beat.

"I'm awfully sorry to bring you fellows up to the home coverts so early in the season," he apologised, as he indicated to Sir Richard the last vacant paper-marked stick in the drive. "Fact of it is, McPherson, my gardener, has been worrying me day after day about the cocks running in from these woods to the kitchen gardens. I suppose they must do a lot of damage. Anyway, he's a good chap, and I had to promise we'd try to drive 'em back to the middle. That's why we're taking the beat this way."

"Shooting hens up here, Andrew?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Shoot any damned thing you like, if it's worth shooting. There's no particular reason to spare the hens—last season's, of course—if they fly well. I'm afraid you'll find the drive a bit narrow for the rabbits, but don't let 'em off if you get a chance."

"Where will you be?" Haslam asked, from his place on the next seat.

"Out in the park. There goes the whistle. It's a shortish beat, but a bit thick."

The usual tapping of trees and crashing of the undergrowth ensued, and the very frequent blowing

of the whistle proved that McPherson's complaint was not altogether unjustified. About three quarters of the way through the beat there was a sudden pause. One of the men called for Robson, the head keeper. There was a short discussion. Then the line came on again. When Robson finally appeared in the drive, he was carrying something in his hand, at the sight of which Sir Richard gave a little start. Andrew, who was walking in from the park, quickened his pace.

"What have you got there, Robson?" he demanded.

"It's some sort of a firearm, sir—a revolver seemingly. One of the beaters kicked his foot against it underneath the big laurel."

Sir Richard and his host both examined it carefully. Haslam leaned over their shoulders. The two former exchanged quick glances.

"Within twenty yards of where your saintlike burglar parked his car!" Andrew exclaimed.

Sir Richard broke open the revolver and dropped it afterwards into his pocket. He turned to the keeper.

"Robson," he enjoined, "can you take me to the exact spot where you found this? You had better come too, Andrew, and you, Haslam. I should suggest every one else goes back to the house."

They made their way into the wood. The beater who had found the revolver indicated the bush from underneath which he had picked it up. Sir Richard went down on his hands and knees, adjusted his

glasses, and made a careful examination. The undergrowth was all broken down and trampled upon. He rose presently with a sigh.

"What a pity!" he muttered. "Where's the beater gone who found it?"

The awkward-looking youth who had conducted them to the place stepped forward. Sir Richard held the weapon out to him.

"You say that you trod upon this?" he enquired.

"Aye, sir," the boy replied.

"Then it was out of sight?"

"Well, I didn't see it, sir, till I stubbed my foot agin it. I was watching an old cock running ahead."

"You couldn't tell whether it seemed to have fallen there accidentally or to have been hidden."

The question was beyond its auditor. He shook his head in vague fashion.

"I just kicked it, sir," he repeated. "It was underneath one of the boughs."

Sir Richard examined the weapon closely.

"It isn't so rusty as I should have expected, after lying out of doors for a month," he remarked thoughtfully. "Pretty well sheltered there, I suppose, and there hasn't been much rain. Let's go back to where Drayton left the car."

They found the exact spot. Sir Richard held the revolver by the muzzle and jerked it towards the laurel bush. It fell within a few feet of the place where it had been discovered. They recovered it and started up for the house together.

"It doesn't look well for your man, Dick, I'm afraid," Andrew observed.

"On the face of it," the lawyer admitted, "it is the worst thing that could have happened—the worst thing in two ways," he went on, as he paused and handed his gun to one of the under keepers. "It shows either that he wasn't telling the truth and that he was carrying a gun, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or that the real criminal is a low-minded brute who means to stick at nothing to save his own skin," the lawyer concluded.

"You don't think that it may have been planted there?"

"It is within the possibilities," was the dry response. "What we have to do now, of course, is to see if there is any way of identifying the weapon."

"You realise, of course," Andrew warned his companion, as they neared the house and turned round towards the back avenue leading to the gunroom, "that since the revolver was found by my men and on my property, I shall be compelled to hand it over to Scotland Yard. I can't allow you, for instance, who are defending the accused man, to keep it and either produce it or not, as it suits you."

"I quite understand that, Andrew," Sir Richard acquiesced gravely. "Sometimes you seem a little mistaken about my aims and activities. My object is to see that justice is done. I believe in Drayton. I mean to use every effort I possess to secure his

acquittal, but I don't intend to conceal anything which the other side have a right to know."

"Kick off your boots here," Andrew invited, as they stepped into the stone-flagged hall. "Miller is there with the slippers. We'll go to my den and have a drink."

Félice stole into her husband's room whilst he was dressing for dinner that evening. He dismissed his servant at once and made her comfortable in an easy-chair while he brushed his hair.

"Andrew," she asked, "what is it they are saying about a revolver which was found in the Home Wood?"

"Quite true," he answered. "The beaters found one near where your friend Max Drayton's car was parked."

"Will that not be very bad for the man?" she ventured anxiously.

"Very bad indeed. If they can prove that it ever belonged to him, or one of his pals, I'm afraid the great Glenlitten mystery will burst like a bubble."

"I do not believe that the man on the ladder used a revolver," was Félice's stubborn pronouncement. "I did see him, and there was nothing in his hand."

"It may not have seemed so to you," her husband pointed out, "but you must remember that it was very nearly dark, that you were in bed and naturally terrified. Of course, he had to deny it. He must try to save his skin somehow, but if he didn't throw

that gun into the laurel bush, who did? We tested the distance. It was just about as far as a man, jerking it in the ordinary way, could throw it. Cotton tried, and it fell within a few feet."

"What is going to be done with it?" she enquired.

"Eventually," he confided, "it will find its way to Scotland Yard. For the present, the Chief Constable—Ted Hartopp, you know—is on his way over from Winchester to take care of it. Why, you don't want to see it, do you?"

She shuddered.

"Of course I do not," she said reproachfully.

"It comes to this," Andrew went on, leaning a little forward to arrange his tie, "that either this is Drayton's revolver—the revolver he did the trick with and chucked into the shrubbery, when he got into the car—or some one has planted it there deliberately, with the idea of strengthening the case against him. Of course, if that were the truth, it would be a low-down trick, and the fellow who did it would deserve all that was coming to him; but I'm afraid I'm rather changing my mind, Félice. I don't regret having helped Drayton—you can give his wife another five hundred quid if you want to—but I'm beginning to believe that he did the trick. . . . Yes, I know," he continued, turning away from the glass in search of his coat, "I know that he and his wife and his friends—and even the police—agree that he never carried a gun, but they can't tell that he hadn't one that night, put away as a last resort. That's

how it looks to me. You see, this was a much bigger job than he usually took on. What is it, Brooks?"

There had been a knock at the door. Andrew's valet entered.

"Major Hartopp is in the library, my lord, just arrived from Winchester," he announced.

"Show him into the billiard room and tell him I'll be down in two minutes," Andrew directed. "Shall you come with us and hear what he has to say, Félice?"

She clung to his arm.

"I do not believe that I want to very much," she sighed, "but I will. Andrew?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do you really imagine that there could be any one so wicked in the world as to hide that pistol and hope that it would be found, just to make it seem that it must have belonged to Drayton? But what a horrible idea!"

He hesitated.

"A man who has committed murder," he pronounced—"murder in cold blood—for whoever shot De Besset shot him in cold blood—is capable of anything. The most satisfactory thing would be if Drayton, now that the gun has been found, were to confess."

"Confess to a crime which he did not commit?" she exclaimed indignantly.

He passed his arm around her waist, and they descended the stairs together.

CHAPTER XX

They found several others of the house party in the billiard room, and Andrew, after greeting his visitor, unlocked a gun cabinet, produced the revolver, and laid it upon the table. It was a weapon of fairly modern type, with the flat handle and narrow barrels generally affected by the person who wishes to conceal the fact that he is armed. Hartopp examined it closely, turning it over once or twice in his hand. It was caked with mud in some places, and there was a little rust upon the barrels.

"I don't think," Sir Richard remarked, as he noticed the Chief Constable's precautions, "that we need consider the matter of finger prints. Personally, I used my handkerchief when it was brought to me, but that was probably too late, as the keeper was carrying it by the butt. In any case, even a few nights lying in an exposed place like that would obliterate any finger prints."

"A few nights!" Hartopp exclaimed. "It's six weeks to-day since the murder."

"Precisely," was the dry rejoinder, "but at present we have nothing but surmise to connect the finding of this weapon with the murder."

The Chief Constable smiled.

"You legal gentlemen are a little finicky," he observed, "but a weapon found exactly where you would expect the burglar to have disposed of it, knowing

that pursuit was close at hand, certainly seems pretty well to speak for itself."

"Curious thing, though," Sir Richard reflected, "I have naturally had one or two conversations with the sergeant here. His men drew a cordon of fifty yards round the car and searched for a whole day without finding a thing. This weapon must have been within that orbit."

"A fact which shows, I am afraid," Major Hartopp confessed, "that my country police are sometimes a little at fault. They're a pretty rustic lot, I must admit."

"Or else that the revolver wasn't there when they searched."

The Chief Constable smiled tolerantly.

"I see your point," he observed. "You're suggesting that the weapon was planted here. Ingenious, but a little far-fetched. There is another thing too, Sir Richard, which I am afraid you will find it difficult to get over."

He pointed to the end of the stock. The lawyer adjusted his eyeglass and bent downwards.

"Some one appears," Major Hartopp pointed out, "to have rudely scratched his initials there. What do you make of those two letters? I must confess that they look to me like an 'M' and a 'D.'"

Sir Richard nodded. He studied the initials for some time.

"Well," he remarked presently, "it may not, after

all, be difficult to convince a jury that a man who takes a revolver out with him to commit a murder and throws it away afterwards, knowing full well that some day or other it will be found, doesn't as a rule scratch his initials on it."

Major Hartopp shrugged his shoulders.

"Sir Richard," he said, "you and I both know something about criminals, and I don't mind telling you that my experience is that in matters of this sort they are the biggest lot of fools on God's earth. I can recall within the last seven years at least half a dozen murders where the criminal has covered up his tracks with the utmost cunning and yet left one perfectly obvious thread dangling for any one to see. They'll go out of their way to guard themselves against the most abstruse things, and the perfectly obvious trap they'll fall into blindfold. Can I have the weapon locked up, Glenlitten?" he concluded, turning away and looking hopefully towards the tray of cocktails which Parkins was bringing in.

"Of course you can."

"One moment," Sir Richard begged.

He took up the magnifying glass which some one had produced and examined the rough letters which had been scratched upon the stock. When he set it down, it was with a slight gesture of contempt.

"I suppose you are all thinking," he said, "that the finding of this has cooked poor Drayton's goose. I don't mind telling you—bit unprofessional, I sup-

pose, but still it can't do much harm—I don't mind telling you all that I never felt so hopeful of getting him off."

"Just why?" Andrew asked curiously.

"Because," Sir Richard continued, holding his cocktail up to the light, "I am convinced now that the real murderer is something of a fool as well as a rogue. I have three reasons for believing that this weapon was planted where it was found. Lock it up. Andrew—lock it up by all means. I would rather you did. In fact, I myself don't want it touched. I have seen all I want of it. The prosecution will never be able to prove that that weapon belonged to Max Drayton. The one thing it may help to do is to prove that the real murderer—"

Sir Richard paused, took a cigarette from a box and lit it. Every one looked at him enquiringly.

"I sometimes think," he concluded, "that I am too deeply embued with the vice of my profession—I talk too much."

Hartopp was easily persuaded to stay on and dine. As though by common consent, however, the conversation did not once touch upon the afternoon's discovery or upon the tragedy whose shadow still hung over the household. Félice was a little graver than her usual self but she was still a charming and tactful hostess. Curiously enough, it was Haslam, generally the most silent, who contributed the largest share to the conversation. A famous disciple of

the occult had just died, and some of his theories had been held up almost to derision in the Press, even by those earlier admirers who had once freely admitted his exceptional psychic powers. Haslam began to talk of the tribes in West Africa farthest removed from civilisation, of their steady and consistent distaste of any association with the white men, their self-sufficiency, their secret and sometimes amazing rites. He gave them all a fascinating description of a month he had spent in the cave dwelling of one of the priests, when they had been shut off from the world by a terrible flood, and had been fed only by a few tribesmen who reached them with supplies along paths no white men could have trodden. Hartopp, who was a profound sceptic, listened to some of Haslam's statements with an air of obvious and immense disbelief.

"Tell us," he invited, "one thing that your friend did which was not capable of explanation, which seemed to you in any way supernatural."

"I will tell you certainly," was the calm reply. "You may not believe it—it is the gift of some men not to believe—but this is what happened. We had received our usual food and supplies, and no more were due for five days. In the night I had an accident. I left the stopper out of the leather water bottle, and it was all spilt. We were there without water for five days."

"Well?"

"The nearest huts from where we were, which had

survived the flood, were between twenty-five and thirty miles away—more than that, I should say, but certainly thirty. This is what my companion did. He sat at the mouth of our cave and he faced the mountain and further range of hills over which these messengers would have to cross. For an hour he sat in absolute silence. I watched him, and although sometimes I fancied his lips moved, no sound came. Then later, as the night drew on, he began to make a curious humming sound, as though one were blowing into bowls of wood, out of which some of these people fashion musical instruments. You might have believed that it could have been heard say fifty yards off, by a person with good hearing. The settlement, as I think I told you, was thirty miles away. By nightfall of the next day, two of the tribesmen arrived with fresh supplies of water."

"Did they give any explanation as to why they came?" Hartopp asked, after a moment's silence.

"At that time I didn't understand the language very well, but I did gather as much as this. The elder one said, 'We heard, we obeyed.' I asked the priest point-blank, which was a wicked and irreligious thing to do, how he communicated with them, and at first he only smiled. Then he said, 'The heathen'—meaning us—'have built cities in which they live, and they have the law of cities, which they have filled with their own witchery. To us it is given to bend the winds and airs and stars to our will, so that they carry our messages."

There was another brief silence. Hartopp fidgeted uneasily in his place.

"All rot, of course," he muttered. "They faked the thing somehow."

"Nevertheless," Haslam maintained quietly, "we got the water. I," he went on, a moment or two later, "when I first went out there, was a sceptic. When I had been out there ten or twelve years, I realised that scepticism was the most culpable form of ignorance."

Félice, who had been listening with dilated eyes, leaned a little towards him.

"Tell us," she begged, "did your priest teach you any of his gifts at all?"

Haslam shook his head.

"Very few. To us those men are savages," he continued. "They themselves pretend that they have something of Godship in their priestcraft. That may be. They seem to inherit a particular gift of focussing their brains and their will power upon any one object for an incredible space of time. They produce images in their brains which are perfectly amazing. They go on, and these images seem touched at last with something which might well be real life. One night—the night, poor fellow, when he felt that he was going to die—my man talked to me more than ever before, because by then I had learned the secret language which only the priests and a few others spoke. He told me, speaking of justice, that in his tribe no man was ever punished without deserts,

whether the punishment was slight or of death. When I asked him how he could be sure of that, this was his answer: 'Because,' he told me, 'those of us who have attained the priesthood—alas, our members grow fewer—have attained to the divine gift of knowing and seeing truth. Some white men,' he went on, 'come near the gift. Perhaps in time I could give it to you, Chief Haslam.' "

"And did he?" Félice whispered.

"I sometimes think that he did," was the quiet but curiously convincing reply. "If ever a time has come when there has arisen a question as to the guilt or innocence of a certain person with regard to a certain deed, I have known the truth—and I have never been wrong."

Every one was looking at him, from all round the table. Something about his voice and whole manner seemed different that night, and the immediate significance of his words suddenly dawned upon every one. Félice grasped his wrist. The fingers of her other hand pointed upwards towards her bedchamber.

"You know," she cried—"you know who fired that shot?"

"Yes," he answered. "I know."

CHAPTER XXI

THEY were trifles which snapped the tension, brought back a sense of the ordinary into the atmosphere of drama which Haslam seemed somehow or other, quietly and without effort, to have created. Parkins entered with more champagne, the remainder of the servants with other courses. Félice dropped her bag. Hartopp demanded a cigarette. The party was normal again. Suddenly Sir Richard leaned across and gripped his host by the arm.

"Look at Haslam," he whispered.

Haslam was sitting quite still in his chair; his eyes seemed to have grown larger and yet to have become suddenly void of all expression. His lips were a little parted. He appeared perfectly rigid. Félice, noticing something unusual, addressed some casual remark to him. There was no reply.

"Is he ill?" Andrew exclaimed softly.

Doctor Meadows, who was seated on the other side of Lady Susan, intervened.

"Don't take any notice," he enjoined. "Go on talking. I saw this once before. It will either pass off immediately or he will be like that for days. Leave him alone. Let him come to naturally or not at all."

They talked—no one knew exactly what about. The butler filled Haslam's glass with the others. Suddenly every one was surprised. He raised it to his lips and made some remark in natural fashion to the young barrister by his side.

"You were bringing those tall ones down very well, Grindells," he observed.

The young man gasped.

"You weren't doing so badly yourself, sir," he found presence of mind enough to reply. "They didn't look so high at your corner, but they had a nasty swerve on."

"I missed a good many I ought to have killed," Haslam reflected.

Every one talked shooting at a great pace. Presently Haslam leaned a little towards Félice.

"Tell me," he asked, "have I been talking West Africa too much? I have an idea I let myself go, and then, as always happens if I do, I forget."

"You were very interesting," Félice assured him tactfully.

"One loses oneself," he confessed, "but I will tell you one more thing. My friend the priest there and I were talking one night during the last stage of his illness. I said to him then— 'Are you not afraid that some day I shall go back and tell my white brothers all these wonderful things?' And he smiled. 'You will not go very far, Chief Haslam,' he assured me. 'The veil will drop over your eyes.' Anyhow, the fellow told the truth," Haslam went on carelessly, "in so far that I always break off in the middle, when I do feel disposed to talk, and I don't remember much afterwards. One thing I do remember," he added, looking down the table towards his host, "is this 1911 Cliquot. Do you recollect,

Andrew, I was with you when you bought it? You were for having twenty dozen at first. Then the man pressed you and got it up to fifty dozen. Eventually I think you bought the lot."

"Jove, you're right!" Andrew exclaimed. "Seventy-one dozen, and I never bought better wine in my life. What a memory you've got, Rodney."

"Ten years ago it was," the latter remarked. "You had just succeeded. I was beginning to feel the real fascination of Africa in those days and to realise that I would never be happy anywhere else. Yet we had a good time. I remember coming to the conclusion, after seeing Andrew pass through his first season without even a touch, that he was a bachelor for life."

"So I should have been," Andrew declared, "if I hadn't found Félice."

She laughed happily as they all raised their glasses.

"I think," she said, "after that very charming speech, I remind myself of your English custom. I take myself away to think how nice six grown-up men can be to one poor little woman."

Haslam moved across the floor, his usual cold, distinguished self, held open the door and smiled quietly down upon his hostess.

"So long as you do not desert us for the whole evening."

Félice shook her head.

"You are all far to nice."

With their port upon the table and the servants out of the room, conversation drifted almost inevitably back to the afternoon's find. Two people only withdrew from the discussion—Sir Richard and Haslam. The former, with his glass in his hand, moved to the other side of the table, and took the vacant chair next to Haslam.

"I will join you if I may," he suggested.

"Delighted," the other murmured.

"*À propos* of this revolver find," he continued, "it is curious how the British mind—perhaps I should say the mind of the British jury—is always fascinated by anything in the nature of circumstantial evidence. Any one in my profession knows that circumstantial evidence needs very careful linking up or it may fall to pieces quicker than any other."

Haslam nodded assent.

"Evidence is sometimes very misleading," he said. "To my mind a lawyer should never waste too much time sweeping up the crumbs. It is through his psychological studies that he will attain the truth, and when he has the truth it is much easier to work backwards."

"You'd have made a decent criminal lawyer yourself, Haslam," Sir Richard smiled.

"As a matter of fact," the other replied, "if it doesn't sound too egotistic, I may tell you that I have a great reputation in my own district as a judge. No one ever disputes my verdicts. I sometimes think that if I were to make a slip and pronounce

an innocent man guilty, he would believe that he had been deceived and accept his fate quite quietly. The semi-savage mind is primitive but amazingly apprehensive."

"When do you retire?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Not until my limit has been reached. And I doubt whether I shall come home then."

"A confirmed bachelor?"

Sir Richard was never sure whether it was his fancy or whether Haslam's eyes really rested for a moment upon that empty chair at the bottom of the table.

"I shall never marry," he said simply. "There is no form of life here which would content me, and certainly the life I lead in Africa would appeal to very few women. I have lost touch, you know, Sir Richard. These visits of mine to England, pleasant though they are, are like cameos, like Wedgwood plates upon the panels of life. I always feel a sense of relief when I step on to the dock at Southampton, and a still greater one when I pass up the gang-plank on to the steamer on my way home. Just at first perhaps I don't appreciate what is going to happen to me, because I find the bustle of the steamer annoying. It is when we come in sight of the low flat stretches, the cramped trees, the rising country beyond, when we near Africa—that is perhaps my happiest day."

"Any sport?" Sir Richard asked.

"Heaps," Haslam assented. "I talked a little

strangely to-night, I believe. I do sometimes. It's the effect of living so much alone amongst a very superstitious, and yet in a way naturally educated people, that makes one like that. I enjoy just the same things as other people out there. I'm very keen on my shooting. The Governor very nearly complained of me last year for taking two months' leave instead of six weeks. They didn't know that I was hunting down a man as well as my big game. Then there are some quite decent chaps out there. We foregather once in a while. And those long trips of mine into the interior don't occur so often now. I have a great half-yearly court, about two hundred miles in the bush, and I make the people come to me. I don't have a sheriff and a coachman with a wig, and a glass-windowed coach and outriders, or that sort of thing, but I have the equivalent. Form appeals to the African mind—form and sentiment. They haven't learned yet to place reason upon the throne and worship nothing else. They still have to be convinced through their senses."

Parkins had entered the room and stood by Major Hartopp's side. During a momentary silence every word of his message was heard.

"I beg your pardon, sir; Colonel Woodward has telephoned from Winchester Jail. He wishes to speak to you urgently."

With a word of apology, the Chief Constable quitted his place and departed. Andrew presently rose to his feet.

"Can't suggest like Barrie that we 'Join the Ladies,' " he observed, "but I daresay Félice would be glad to see us."

They trooped towards the door. On their way they met Hartopp returning.

"A little loving message from our friend Drayton, eh?" Andrew remarked.

Hartopp shook his head.

"It seems Drayton has been taken ill," he said. "They got hold of the news of the finding of the revolver in Winchester this afternoon, and some ass must have told him. Governor wants my authority for his removal to the infirmary."

"You consented, of course?" Andrew asked.

Hartopp nodded.

"Can't go against the doctors," he replied.

CHAPTER XXII

At about eleven o'clock on the following morning, a faded looking yellow taxicab, running on three cylinders, hobbled up the stately drive of Glenlitten. The drizzling rain made its progress all the time more difficult; sheets of grey mist swept across the park; even the deer had found some hiding place and were invisible. Steadily, and still more steadily, the rain fell. Parkins, who answered the bell when at last the vehicle drew up with a snort in front of the door, hurried out in mild surprise, an umbrella in his hand. He looked at the woman who was the solitary passenger with misgiving. There was nothing about her appearance which suggested that by day or night she would be a welcome visitor.

"You wish to see any one here?" he asked, advancing to the door of the taxicab but taking care not to throw it open.

"I wish to see Lady Glenlitten," she answered wearily. "I am sure she will see me. Let me come into the hall for a moment, and you shall have my name."

The butler held up the umbrella. The woman, displaying a soaked stretch of silk-stockinged leg, descended. As soon as she had reached the shelter of the great porch, the butler turned towards the taxicab driver.

"Where have you come from?" he enquired.

"Winchester," the man groaned. "Rain in my

carburettor, only three cylinders working, and pretty well wet through."

"You'd better get round to the back, through the courtyard gates there," the butler directed. "See Mr. Heggs, my second. He'll look after you."

The taximan scented hospitality, and his face relaxed. He jumped into the driving seat of his wheezy vehicle and hobbled off. Parkins now found himself face to face with a puzzle.

"Her ladyship is at home," he admitted. "You'd better come this way and give me your name."

He led the woman to a pleasant sitting room, with a warm fire burning in the grate—a room hung with sporting prints, furnished with many easy-chairs and having a general air of comfort. It was here that he was wont to entertain superior tradespeople, farmers and others, who called to see the steward. The woman crept shuddering to the fire. For the second of October, it was a cruel day.

"Her ladyship's always been very kind to me," she said, looking at Parkins. "Why, you've let me in yourself once at Glenlitten House in Curzon Street. She'll see me—I'm sure she'll see me. My name's Drayton—Mrs. Drayton."

Parkins looked at her with mute sympathy. The rain had played havoc with her cheap clothes; her hair was standing out in straight wisps under her soaked hat, her shoes were pitifully thin.

"I had to walk about in Winchester for some time," she explained, "before I could get anything

to bring me. There was no train, and I had to come."

"I'll let her ladyship know that you're here," he promised. "May I send you a glass of port?"

"It's a Christian household this," the woman declared, with a little gulp. "Don't make it too small, sir, and a biscuit if you can. I left London at six this morning. They told me my husband was going dotty. Not a thing has passed my lips yet to-day."

The butler himself arranged a little tray, which he sent by an underling, before he made his way in search of Annette. He found that cheerful young lady in a sewing room on the first floor, with her feet up and reading a novel.

"Mademoiselle," he said sternly, "*pas permis.*"

Annette crushed her cigarette into a saucer.

"Mr. Parkins," she enjoined, "we will remain friends so long as you do not attempt to speak French with me. Why are you disturbing me at my work?"

"Disturbing you fiddlesticks!" was the emphatic retort. "Supposed to be sewing, aren't you?"

"That," Annette assured him, smiling sweetly, "is a matter entirely between her ladyship and myself."

Mr. Parkins relaxed. After all, she was the young lady of the household with whom he preferred to foxtrot in the evening, and to have on his right-hand side at dinner time.

"It's that woman, Mrs. Drayton," he told her. "The burglar's wife, you know. She's come up from Winchester—from the jail, I expect—to see her

ladyship. Terrible state she's in too—half wet through, and come all the way in a mouldy taxi. Don't see what we can do for her, I'm sure, but so long as she's here, will you see if her ladyship will receive her, or if I am to send her away."

Annette swung round and held out her very pretty hands.

"Help me, please," she begged. "I am tired this morning."

"Her ladyship went to bed early enough," Parkins reminded her, having duly lingered over his pleasant task.

"Yes, but I was playing bridge in the housekeeper's room," Annette yawned. "You had the gentleman to entertain, and very unsociable you were."

"I cannot stand Mrs. Anderson's bridge," Parkins confided solemnly. "I'm used to an intelligent game myself and I prefer a hand or two at poker, when Mrs. Anderson chooses to play. However, that doesn't matter. Another evening I shall fetch you myself. Kindly deliver my message to her ladyship. I will wait for you here."

Annette looked at the various garments lying around.

"I am not at all sure, Mr. Parkins," she hesitated, "that this is a fit place for you. I am filling in a little spare time by making some garments for myself."

The butler sat stolidly down, with his eyes upon a mass of pink-coloured material.

"Don't hurry," he enjoined. "The young person downstairs is taking a glass of port."

Annette returned in a few minutes. She sat upon the table and swung a very shapely leg back and forth.

"Well?" she asked. "What do you suppose the answer is?"

"Knowing her ladyship's infallible good nature," Parkins predicted, "I should say that she has decided to hear what the young woman has to say."

"What sagacity!" Annette exclaimed. "You are always right, Mr. Parkins. You make no mistakes. I have turned on the water for her ladyship's bath. In half an hour, Mr. Parkins, and please leave this room at once. I can see already that you have been too curious. I declare that I shall blush when I wear any of these things in your presence. In half an hour I shall ring her ladyship's bell, and you can bring the person up to the Empire sitting room."

Mr. Parkins rose to his feet.

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Mademoiselle," he said. "In the meanwhile—"

But Annette was already at the door. She turned and threw him a kiss.

"The bath fills so quickly," she called out, as he tried to detain her. . . .

In less than half an hour the bell sounded, and Mrs. Drayton, having partaken of bacon and eggs, rolls and butter, and three glasses of port, was ushered upstairs. Notwithstanding the fact that she

was a very different woman from the one who had arrived, there was something in her expression which remained unchanged. She was a woman who had looked into the face of terror and carried its spell still with her.

"So you have found me out down here," Félice said kindly, as she waved her visitor to a seat. "Well, what news is there now, Mrs. Drayton?"

"You know, my lady," the woman answered. "You know what they are saying. They declare that they have found the revolver here with which the French gentleman was shot, that they have found it close to where Max parked his car, and that there are initials scratched upon it. It's a lie—a lie, my lady. Max never owned a gun. There has never been one in the house."

Félice nodded in troubled fashion.

"I remember all that you told me before, Mrs. Drayton," she said. "I was astonished, but there the revolver was in the bottom of a laurel shrub, just the distance a man could throw it from the car. I have seen it myself."

"Listen, my lady," the woman went on. "They telephoned me last night. The warder let Max have a local evening paper. It was against the rules, and I expect now he'll get the sack, but he did it. Max read in it that the revolver had been found that afternoon, and the paper seemed to take it for granted that it was his. He was took ill, collapsed, as they call it, on the spot. My Max isn't a killing

man, my lady. The very sight of blood makes him ill. He can't stay on and see a fight. Then when he saw this he knew for certain that some one was laying for him. There's some one trying to drag him to the gallows. That's a sure thing. And Max—he's afraid!"

"I am very, very sorry," Félice assured her. "You know what I did promise you, and you may be very, very certain that I shall keep my word. But, alas, just now what more can I do?"

"You can do this, my lady," the woman pleaded, "if it isn't too late. Let me have a look at the gun. Max has plenty of pals. Some one's pinched it from one of them perhaps. It might be one I'd recognise. We might be able to get to know then who was framing this."

Félice looked gravely out of the window. From the far distance came the occasional sound of guns.

"Major Hartopp had it packed up to take away with him last night," she said.

"But he didn't take it," the woman interrupted. "I found out as much as that at the prison. He decided that it had better be sent to Scotland Yard. One of their men has taken over the case, since they resolved to make it a frame-up for murder against poor old Max. The gun's still here, my lady. I want to look at it. It might help."

"I believe it's nailed up in a box," Félice told her reluctantly.

"I'll get the nails out if I tear my fingers to

pieces," the woman cried. "Tell me where the box is. Tell me how to find my way there quickly."

Félice rose slowly to her feet.

"Come with me," she directed. "If we meet any of the upper servants or any of the gentlemen back from the shooting because of the rain, remember I'm showing you over the house. Look around you as we go."

"I'm on, lady."

They passed down the splendid staircase into the main hall and crossed the picture gallery into the billiard room. There, upon the table, stood a wooden box in which some cases of cartridges had come down a few days before from London.

"The revolver is in there," Félice confided. "Wait a moment. I wonder whether I dare have one of the servants take the lid off."

"Don't you do it, my lady," the woman advised. "I can find out what I want to know. If you call the servants, they'd only get interfering."

She flung herself upon the box, tore at the sides, pried her fingers under the lid; in a few moments the blood was streaming from their tips. She crowded a newspaper underneath and went on with her task. She was like a she-wolf, tearing at the box. Her elbow even pushed Félice away.

"I'm going to see it, my lady," she insisted. "The lid's nearly off. I ain't doing no harm. The blood isn't going on the billiard cloth. It's my Max, my

lady. I've got to see it. They're going to let me have a word with him to-night."

With a crash, the top yielded. From the heap of shavings inside, she extracted the gun. She turned it over, shook it, glanced at the initials scratched upon the butt, and let it drop from her fingers.

"My God!" she cried. "But there's wicked men in this world! My lady, there's murderers around!"

"What do you mean?" Félice demanded.

The woman's passion was infectious; Félice, too, was trembling.

"That gun—you see it—that belongs to Bill Martin, my brother, my husband's brother-in-law. That's how they're doing this vile thing on him, but on my b . . . y—I beg your ladyship's pardon—God's truth, them two initials 'M.D.' wasn't there a month ago."

Félice tried to think clearly.

"Please don't be so excited," she begged. "What is it you are trying to say? Do you mean that the revolver really belongs to your brother-in-law, and that some one has scratched your husband's initials upon it?"

"So help me, God, my lady, that's the truth!" the woman moaned. "They'll trace that gun all right. They'll trace it to Max's brother-in-law easily enough. I'll be straight with you. Bill's in jail. It wasn't much he did, but he's in for fourteen months. Ellen's always drunk. She'd sell it for a quid.

They've pinched it somehow. Now they've got it planted on him sure."

"Are you certain," Félice asked her, "that your husband didn't borrow the gun from your brother-in-law?"

"As sure as I stand on my feet. I saw it in Bill's sitting room three days after Max had done the job, whilst he was hiding. The gun was there then, all clean, and without any initials scratched on it. What can we do with it, my lady? You don't want Max to swing any more than I do. Isn't there some place we could hide it, where it would be never seen or heard of again? It ain't any use my having seen it in Bill's room. They won't let me give evidence."

They looked at each other helplessly. Already the table was strewn with pieces of torn wood. How to dispose of a solid thing like a revolver, which wouldn't burn? The woman snatched it up as though to conceal it in her dress. Félice shook her head.

"Be careful," she enjoined. "They know who you are here. They will know that I have brought you into the billiard room. There is the broken box. If the gun is missing, there is nothing else to be said. You came here to fetch it because you knew that it would hang your husband. It will not do. We must think of something else."

"Well, what?" the woman demanded. "You are clever, my lady. You've got education, which I haven't got. Think quickly!"

"I think this," Félice declared. "You have the

cleverest *avocat* in England. He will find out who went to your sister-in-law and gave her money so that she parted with the weapon. That will be easy. Then there must be some of your husband's friends who will be able to swear that the gun belonged to your brother and not to him. That is what being a clever lawyer means. Sir Richard will find somebody who will be able to swear that the revolver was where you saw it after September the first."

"There's a-many would swear that, if they'll listen to them," the woman agreed, more hopefully.

"A witness, he goes into the box, he swears he tells the truth, and of course he must be believed," Félice insisted. "Wait!"

She moved to the window and listened. The rain had slackened, and the sound of guns on the other side of the park was still to be heard—more frequent now, but no nearer.

"Listen," she said, "I am going to have Parkins pack up this gun again in another cartridge box. I will tell Sir Richard of your visit. He is here staying in the house. He knows already all about the gun. He will know how to act. If he finds out, remember, who borrowed the gun from your sister-in-law, who scratched those initials on, why then the discovery of this thing will save him instead of hurting him. They will know then how to find the guilty person."

The woman breathed deeply for some moments. The strained look left her face.

"I believe you are right, my lady. The more I think of it, the more I believe you are right."

"Are they going to let you see your husband again to-night?" Félice asked.

The woman nodded.

"He's not so terrible ill," she confided. "He's just nervous, is Max. A shock like hearing about that gun was enough to make a sick man of him. They're letting me see him, all right. It's easy enough in the infirmary. They just search me first to see that I don't take him poison or anything of that sort, and they let me sit and talk with him as free-like as you please. I'll be getting along."

Félice rang the bell.

"You would like a little luncheon, perhaps, Mrs. Drayton?" she suggested.

"The gentleman that's your butler gave me a good bite when I arrived," the woman replied gratefully.

"Then will you send around to the stables for the taxicab and see Mrs. Drayton into it," Félice directed the footman who had answered the bell, "and tell Parkins I want to see him."

Mrs. Drayton departed. She dropped her voice as well as a curtsey as she passed Félice.

"I've finished with saying thank you, my lady," she declared, "and I haven't any words. Some day I may be able to find them when the trouble's over."

Félice waved her away smilingly. The butler made

his dignified appearance. He looked at the débris on the table with astonishment.

"Parkins," his mistress instructed, "I wish you to find another wooden box, pack the revolver up again and remove all that débris."

The man hesitated for a moment.

"Your ladyship wishes the box to appear as though it had been unopened?" he asked deferentially.

"By no means," was the emphatic reply. "The woman who has just left is the wife of the man who committed the burglary here. I permitted her to see the revolver which was found. I may have done wrong, but it is my own responsibility. My husband and Sir Richard will naturally know of it. Both will be told the moment they return. My information to you is for yourself and not for the servants' hall."

Parkins bowed low. Every day his respect for his new mistress increased.

"I'll fetch another box at once, my lady," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

The western half of the county dined that night at Glenlitten, and Félice had never played the part of hostess with more charm or dignity. The French Ambassador, who was a guest in the district, sat on her right, and it was an obvious joy to her to converse in her own language. The Marquis de Bressac was a man of great distinction, a well-known diplomat, and famous traveller.

"I would like to tell you, Lady Glenlitten," he said, "that I am one of those who deeply and fervently sympathise with your country people."

A light flashed into her face, only to pass away again almost immediately.

"In my younger days," the Marquis went on, "I was just an attaché to our Embassy in St. Petersburg and I made many delightful friends. Without a doubt I must have known some of your relations."

Félice's lips were trembling.

"I am not very happy when I force myself to talk of them," she confessed.

"I offer you a thousand apologies," the Ambassador said earnestly. "I should have known better than to have alluded to a subject so painful."

Félice shivered a little. She was looking into that horrible room in Milden Square. De Bressac leaned over and repeated his polite but sincere regrets. He fancied her gazing across Europe at less sordid but even more terrible things.

"I am very foolish to have talked to you like this of a past that can hold nothing but tragedy," he regretted. "I would rather you told me of your life here in England. It appeals to you, the sport, the out-door existence? Never did I see a man who looked so well and happy as your husband."

She pulled herself together. She was a great lady and she was hostess to this very brilliant party.

"My husband deserves to look well and happy," she said. "He is the kindest man I know. And as for the life here, who would not love it? I am even falling in love with the climate."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the Marquis murmured, under his breath.

"It is cold sometimes, it is grey, it is damp," she admitted, "but you face it all. Oh, how hard it was to get me to do that at first. Still, you face it all, and presently there is a glow and one feels well. And the greyness has its beauty and the cold sends the blood springing through your veins. I have only lived here a few months, but I think I could never like to live in any other country."

"You are very fortunately placed," he remarked. "Your estates are wonderful. For at least seven miles of our motor ride here we were in your park, I believe, and some of the views are delightful. Then I have seen your house in Scotland too, in the distance. That is marvellously picturesque."

"Sometimes I love it," she agreed. "The castle is almost on the edge of the cliff and the seas below are

splendid, but I like this better. You will shoot to-morrow, Marquis?"

"We are all coming over," he answered. "Your husband has just been saying that he will have eleven guns. That seems to be a great many for you, but in France it is nothing. They tell us we need to ask large parties to secure a bag there. We shoot so much worse than the English. Your husband, with only six guns, did wonderfully to-day."

The conversation drifted along the usual channels. At the lower end of the table, Lady Susan was trying to get Haslam to talk once more of West Africa, but without success.

"Last night, Lady Susan," he confessed, "I forgot myself for a little time. I try never to speak of the things I do not fully understand. They only confuse other people and confuse me."

"But they told me," she persisted, "that you made an amazing statement."

"Did I? One talks a great deal too much sometimes after your brother's famous port."

"They told me that you know the real secret of that terrible night here," she added, lowering her voice. "Mr. Grindells insisted that you actually said so."

Haslam sipped his wine thoughtfully.

"There are many stages and degrees of knowledge, Lady Susan," he reminded her. "One may have been convinced by actual proof, and if that is so, one may share one's knowledge with every one, be-

cause one can justify one's statement. And again, one may know by conviction just as absolutely, but without the pillars of evidence below, and when it is by conviction one knows one had better hold one's peace. . . . I never saw our hostess look so brilliant as to-night."

"I think that Félice is almost the sweetest and the most beautiful thing alive," Lady Susan declared with enthusiasm. "Even the great sadness of her history has not left a single chastening mark upon her. Hers is the happiness which no one ever grudges. It is the happiness that feeds on happiness and gives out happiness—the real joy of living. When I heard that my brother was marrying some one he had found in a little village of France, I must confess that I was afraid. Now I am very happy."

"It is a very fortunate thing for her," Haslam said, "that you all are so fond of her. It helps her to miss less her own relatives."

"She lost all of them, did she not?" Lady Susan asked.

"Every one, I understand," Haslam replied. "They were extreme Imperialists, and never had a chance. Even now, she cannot bear to think of them. . . ."

Lady Susan lowered her voice a little. There had been a sort of unspoken agreement not to discuss last month's tragedy in public.

"You were there when they found the weapon this afternoon?" she asked.

"Close at hand," he answered. "I have seen it since."

"I suppose that destroys all Sir Richard's theories of his client's innocence?" she ventured.

"I should imagine," Haslam told her diffidently, "that it is an important piece of evidence."

Lady Susan accepted the hint and at the same time caught her hostess' eye.

"There is Félice looking round for Lady Manfield," she remarked, rising to her feet. "Don't sit here drinking port all the evening, Mr. Haslam. I want a rubber or two of bridge and I know it's going to be an early night because of the shooting tomorrow."

"I'll do my best," he promised. . . .

"Tell us some more West African experiences, Haslam," Grindells called down to him from the other end of the table.

Haslam shook his head.

"I talked too much last night," he said. "I expect you're all thinking me pretty crazy. Still, if you live in that atmosphere, you can't help imbibing a little of it."

"Very good for one too," Manfield declared. "We're too cut-and-dried a generation. The whole human race is becoming too much made to pattern. We accept whatever happens too philosophically. We haven't enough superstition left even to be religious. We prefer to be automatic."

"Perhaps," Glenlitten observed, "it's as well the Bishop didn't dine."

"I never find the modern divine a drawback to intelligent conversation," Manfield protested. "They have brains like the rest of us and probably use them more. They have to keep a few water-tight compartments at the back of their minds but they can ignore them when necessary."

Haslam, with his glass in his hand, rose and changed his place. He seated himself next Fraser.

"Seen anything more of the young Russian fellow you brought over that momentous night?" he asked a little abruptly.

"Haven't set eyes on him," Fraser acknowledged. "He was really Philipson's pal. At least, it was he who asked him to Mess that night. Can't say I took to him much myself."

"Neither did I," Haslam agreed. "Still, one has to remember these fellows have been through it. Living in London for the present, isn't he?"

"I can't even tell you that. I'll ask Philipson if you like. He may know."

Haslam hesitated.

"No, don't bother," he begged. "I just wondered whether he had been down in these parts lately."

Andrew presently rose and they all trooped out, some of them passing at once into the rarely opened suite of drawing-rooms, others lingering about the hall. Sir Richard, one of the few to invade the

women's domain, found himself at first a little at a loss. There was a table of very intense bridge players, and three women seated on a divan engaged in vivacious conversation who never even raised their heads at his entrance. Then Félice glided out from a distant corner, passed her arm through his and led him to a small, octagonal chamber which completed the suite—Queen Anne's Drawing-room, it was called, in memory of a reputed visit. She drew him to a distant corner, made him comfortable, and seated herself in a small chair by his side.

"Sir Richard," she said, "I did want very much to see you. Mrs. Drayton has been here to-day from Winchester."

"Mrs. Drayton," he repeated, a little vaguely.

"Your burglar's wife."

"Been here to see you!"

"We have exchanged visits three times," Félice told him. "Once I to see her, twice her to see me. I have helped her a little with money. I wish to help her in every possible way that I can. Her husband sent her to find out about the revolver that was discovered yesterday."

"Good God!" Sir Richard exclaimed.

"I suppose I ought not to have done it," Félice went on—"it was perhaps very wrong of me—but I had the case unpacked and I showed it to her."

"Well?"

"She said that it belonged to her brother, that she saw it in her brother's house three or four days

after the murder had been committed, and that there were no initials upon it."

"Her evidence, unfortunately, will never be admitted," Sir Richard said gravely. "At the same time, if she saw it, perhaps some one else did. Where is this brother of hers?"

"In jail."

"If anything hangs Max Drayton," Sir Richard groaned, "it will be bad luck."

"Nothing shall hang him," Félice declared.

Sir Richard shook his head.

"My dear," he said, and there was a queer Jesuitical note in his voice, "men have been hung on much weaker circumstantial evidence than this. In the first place, so far as we have been able to discover at present, there was no one else within shooting distance of De Besset. Secondly, the burglar had every reason to shoot him, for he was on the point of giving the alarm. Thirdly, the revolver, which can be proved to belong to his brother-in-law, and has his own initials scratched upon it, has been found within twenty-five yards of where he left his car. How am I to deal with all these damning facts? I'm beginning to doubt whether the jury will keep awake to listen to me."

"But you don't believe he did it yourself," Félice urged, a note of distress in her tone.

"I do not," Sir Richard admitted, "but I should imagine I am the only man breathing who wouldn't, on the face of the evidence."

"If you don't believe it," she cried, "there must be a way of finding out the truth."

"There is one way," he urged.

"Well?" she demanded eagerly.

"That every person who was in the house that night should tell all he or she knows, that no one should be shielded, that the absolute and entire truth should be told. Then perhaps Drayton may have a chance."

"When is the trial?" Félice asked, a little abruptly.

"The Assizes commence the sixth of December at Winchester."

"Before then," she murmured, "something will happen—I am sure that something will happen."

Sir Richard shook his head gravely.

"I wouldn't be too sanguine," he advised. "Pretty well the worst that can happen for my man has already happened—unless they find the necklace and trace it to him. As the case stands at present, Drayton is in for it, and he knows it, poor devil! He knows it more than ever now."

"Is he terrified?" she asked, a little hush in her voice.

"He's more terrified than any man I've ever seen or heard of," Sir Richard confessed. "He made no sort of fuss when he was arrested for the burglary. He never has done. He's just faced it and taken his punishment, but the idea of the gallows seems to be driving him almost mad. He's always trying to crane his head out of the cell window to see where they're

built. He can't take his exercise without screaming out when he comes to the corner. The doctor told me he frightened himself into this last illness, sweating all night with fear. I'm afraid he'll be an abject sight when the trial comes on."

A passing reflection of horror was in Félice's face.

"Tell him from me, Sir Richard," she begged, "he shall not hang. I would rather perjure myself."

"Why?" Sir Richard asked swiftly.

They glanced around, aware of the presence of a newcomer. Haslam was standing underneath the arched opening.

"Your husband is looking for you, Lady Glenlitten," he announced tonelessly. "There is some question of dancing. The matter, I think, is to be referred to you."

Félice sprang lightly up and held out her hand to her companion.

"We will dance," she insisted. "Every one must dance for half an hour at least. Afterwards you eager sportsmen can go to bed and Sir Richard and I will finish our conversation."

"Mayn't I be included?" Haslam asked.

"On one condition," Félice assented suddenly: "that you prove the truth of what you said last night at dinner time."

"I talked too much last night," he confessed gloomily. "What is it that I am to prove?"

"You say that you know. Save that poor fellow's life and tell us who killed Raoul de Besset."

Haslam's expression was inscrutable.

"One may have knowledge of a thing," he reminded them, "without the power or the will to publish it to the world. I will compromise with you, Lady Glenlitten. I will promise you this—no innocent man shall ever hang for the murder of Raoul de Besset."

He swung around on his heel and departed abruptly. Félice and Sir Richard watched his disappearing form.

"You think that he means it?" Félice demanded breathlessly.

Sir Richard was deep in thought. His eyes were watching the tall, gaunt figure, passing now out of sight. Félice was obliged to repeat her question.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "I think that he means it. All the same—"

The strains of music floated down from the gallery close at hand. Andrew suddenly presented himself.

"You may flirt with my wife afterwards if you wish, you old reprobate," he said to Sir Richard, "but at least I claim my first dance."

CHAPTER XXIV

Mr. Felix Main's domestic life was spent in two fair-sized rooms over his office. All that he had to do, when the cares of business were over, was to mount one flight of stairs, unlock the door facing him, and, if by chance Mrs. Main were at home, submit himself to the connubial embrace. The door adjoining was the door of his bedchamber, and a very small kitchen on the other side, provided with a gas stove, completed the establishment. Mrs. Main had once been a cinema actress, or in the pictures, as she termed it, and entertained ambitions towards renewing her professional life. Her appearance, however, had suffered from lack of exercise, too much smoking, an excessive use of cosmetics, and a constant, if not to say immoderate, addiction to alcoholic sustenance which had, at thirty years of age, made it difficult for her to satisfactorily undertake the ingénue parts of her youth. Her baby face had lost its freshness, her eyes their brightness, her figure its grace. She had a little money, having been the daughter of a respectable grocer at Camden Hill, some of which she had parted with to her husband and some of which she had wisely kept for her own use. She spent half her life grumbling, but there were many less contented women. Although she was pledged to go to the pictures this evening, in view of her husband's entertainment of an important client, she lingered about the room, unwilling to de-

part. Charles, in his well-cut and well-pressed clothes, with his tall figure and his foreign accent, had distinctly taken her fancy. She would have much preferred to stay at home and share the bottle of wine which her husband had purchased earlier in the day from a neighbouring restaurant. Neither of the men, however, to her great regret, showed signs of wishing for her presence.

"Well, you two do look as though you were in for a good time," she said glancing at the gold-topped bottle, the cigarettes and cigars upon the table. "Mean trick sending me off to the pictures, don't you think so, Mr. de Suess? I'm just feeling sociable to-night too."

The blue eyes were lifted to his in a manner which she had once found to be irresistible, but Charles remained a block of wood. Outwardly stolid, he was inwardly nervous and impatient. All he wanted was to drink a tumblerful of that wine and get on with the business.

"It's a pity you have to go," he replied politely, "but our business is very dull and stupid. It would not interest you, yet it must be done. Perhaps," he added, as an afterthought, "we shall still be here when you come back."

"Mind you are," she enjoined. "I won't stop for a drink, however many of my friends I meet. I'll hurry back to hear how you've got on."

Mr. Felix Main, who was not addicted to acts of courtesy, rose to his feet and held the door open.

She passed out with a little backward wave of the hand to Charles. Her husband waited until he heard the front door close behind her before he proceeded to open the bottle of wine.

"Well, I hope you feel at ease now, Mr. de Suess?" he said. "There's not a soul can come near the house. We've got the premises absolutely to ourselves and we haven't even a servant to pry around."

Charles threw himself into the most comfortable chair, pushed away his host's cigarettes contemptuously and lit one from his own case.

"I am beginning to wish," he declared slowly, "that I had never entered into this business. I think that I would have made just as much money out of my sister in other ways."

"Now, in what way?" Mr. Felix Main demanded, pouring out a tumblerful of the gold-foiled but rather too foaming beverage, and handing it to his guest. "In what way, I should like to know? From what you have told me, I realise that Lord Glenlitten must never learn of your relationship. Why should he do anything to provide for a strange young man at his wife's instigation? Ridiculous! You were right to take the matter into your own hands. Remember, I haven't seen it yet, but every one has agreed as to the value of that necklace, Mr. de Suess. Thirty thousand pounds will bear a split."

"I don't suppose you'll get the full value for the stones," Charles reminded him gloomily.

"I don't suppose I shall," the other admitted,

"but I shall get more than any one else will and I shall get it safely. Say we get twenty thousand pounds. That's ten thousand each. Doesn't that satisfy you?"

"I wouldn't go through what I've gone through the last month again for all the money that was ever coined," Charles groaned, sipping his wine absently. "However, the thing can't be undone now."

"Why should it be undone? You have taken a wise and sensible course. You have found a friend who will make everything safe and easy for you. You have seen the newspapers to-day, for instance?"

"Yes, I have seen them," Charles told him.

"Who is there now to hint at any mystery in connection with the Glenlitten case?" Mr. Felix Main demanded, smiling in his own peculiar fashion. "Since the discovery of the revolver, the whole Press now takes the affair for granted. Why shouldn't they? Sir Richard Cotton himself knows that it's all U.P. with his client. I heard to-day in the city—I wouldn't swear it's true, mind, but a man on the force told me—that Sir Richard was throwing up the case, didn't believe in his client any longer and was angry with him for not having told him the truth."

"I wish he would throw it up," Charles muttered. "I hate the fellow. It gives me the shivers to look at him."

"He is a very clever man but he is no trouble to you now, Mr. de Suess. There is nothing he can

do, no outlet for all the cunning he ever possessed. The jury will take not ten minutes, not five, to deliberate. It will be all over, and then gradually, one at a time, we can dispose of the jewels."

"It's a strange business for you to be in," Charles said suspiciously.

"It is not my business at all," Felix Main assured him. "Only, in my time, I have had clients of all sorts, and I have had wonderful bargains brought to me by men who were desperate and had to leave the country. How many brilliants are there in the necklace?"

"Forty-eight."

"You have brought it with you? What better time could there be than now to let me look at it?"

Charles thrust his right hand into his trousers pocket, glanced at the blind behind to be sure that it was down, and the Glenlitten necklace, flashing for a moment like a shower of falling water touched by the sunlight, fell upon the table.

Felix Main gasped almost hysterically as he stood there looking at the glittering cascade of priceless gems. His common, pinched little face was transformed, his mouth slipped open, and an unsuspected front tooth appeared. He was breathing quickly, and beads of moisture forced their way out on his forehead. In his eyes there shone the great greed.

"Gawd!" he exclaimed. "My Gawd!"

He passed his fingers over the gems, picked up the necklace and held it, spread it out upon the

table again, caressed it, smoothed two of the larger stones with yellow-stained fingers. All the time he seemed scarcely conscious of his companion's presence.

"No wonder they made a fuss about it," he said at last. "I've seen a few diamonds; I've never seen any like this."

"Finish looking at it and let's put it away," Charles suggested nervously. "Some one might ring the bell. Any one could lose their heads with that about."

Felix Main was muttering to himself.

"I've had swell thieves to see me sometimes," he acknowledged—"chaps who if they haven't actually put any one's light out, have knocked them silly and taken the risk of what might happen, but Gawd! a man might commit murder for this—he might indeed, Mr. de Suess. I wouldn't blame any one. I almost feel," he went on, breathing quickly, with one hand upon the largest stone, "that I'd commit murder myself for it."

"Kill me, eh?" Charles grunted.

"No. Kill any one who tried to take it away from us."

Charles rose to his feet. The sight of the necklace seemed to have produced an uneasy effect upon both of them. His own unwholesome complexion seemed to have become a little yellower in tone. He too had grown hot and dabbed his forehead feverishly. His hands were moist and his lips dry.

"Let's go ahead with this, Main," he insisted. "What I want is money to carry on with—money; I want money every hour. I can't wait until it is safe to sell the big stones. What I thought was I might get half a dozen of the smaller ones out, have them reset or broken up, and raise something that way."

"Yes," Felix Main muttered absently. "We might do that."

"Listen to me, will you?" Charles almost shouted. "Don't stand there looking like a mesmerised rabbit. Listen to me whilst I tell you what must be done. If you are my partner in this, you must do as I wish."

Felix Main raised his head and glanced at this big, formidable-looking young man. Yes, he was tall and he had great limbs—at one time, without doubt, huge muscles. Just now he seemed like a windbag, as though one blow in the right place would knock him out. The detective moistened his dry lips.

"Yes, we are partners," he admitted hoarsely. "We will decide together what is best to be done."

"You fool," Charles scoffed, "it is I who will decide. What have you done to be my partner? Nothing yet. You arranged the revolver business, true. I daresay that is all right. You have undertaken to dispose of the diamonds. You haven't done anything about that yet. This is where you are to be tested. If we are partners, tell me what you propose. I

want several thousand pounds. I need clothes. I must have an automobile. There is a lady—"

"Yes, I understand," Felix Main interrupted. "Very well, Mr. de Suess, I will tell you what I propose."

He ran over the stones rapidly.

"There are twelve here—beautiful stones," he pointed out, "but not unusual in size or colour or shape. I propose that I have those twelve taken out, chipped a little—I fear that will be necessary—and deposited with a man I know of. He will ask no questions. He will give me a receipt for them by weight and he will advance perhaps half their value, which is as much as one can hope for."

"What do you suppose half the value would be?" Charles demanded.

Felix Main brooded for some time longer over the necklace. He touched the stones lovingly, one by one.

"They are not the best of the stones," he said. "I think, perhaps, for the twelve, I could get an advance of two thousand pounds. That would be a thousand each."

"I want more than that," was the angry protest. "What do you want an advance for? You're not in need of money, are you? You can take your share when the rest are sold."

Mr. Felix Main shook his head.

"In a partnership," he rejoined, "it is better to divide as we sell. Yes, I think so, Mr. de Suess—

divide as we sell. You will leave it to me. I will have the necklace broken up. You shall come with me, if you will, to the man who will advance the money, or you shall see his papers. Half of what we get for the twelve stones shall be paid to you at once. Remember, you may have run your risk in getting the necklace, but I will run just as great a one in trying to dispose of it. I doubt whether there is any one else could do it safely for you except me. I am not being overpaid, Mr. de Suess. Pray don't think that. I am afraid of the business but I cannot refuse it."

"How long will it be before you can get the money?" Charles asked.

"About a week."

The young man bit his nether lip savagely.

"Do you mean," he expostulated, "that I must leave the necklace in your keeping and get no money for a week?"

Mr. Felix Main extended his hands.

"My dear young friend," he argued, "how else can it be arranged? I have to send a man who works for me down to the East End. I have to go into the workshop and stand over him whilst he takes these stones out. It will cost us fifty pounds, perhaps, that. When they are safely out, you can have the necklace back, if you wish. If I were you, though, I would have all the stones taken out, and have them sealed in a little packet. Then you might put them in a safe deposit. You forget that to be found with

the diamonds stolen from Glenlitten, the jewels that were stolen that night, might be as bad for you as the finding of that revolver will be for Max Drayton."

The young man shivered a little in his chair. There was a venomous gleam in his eyes as he looked towards his companion.

"Mr. Main," he said, "you are not to misunderstand me. I have told you the truth. I stole the necklace. It is my sister's. It was her own fault. She should have provided for us. It is not a great thing, that theft. She would always see to it that I was never charged."

"But the other thing—"

"There was no other thing! Don't imagine for a moment that it was I who shot De Besset. You need never think you have that over me."

Felix Main coughed.

"That's all right, Mr. de Suess," he agreed soothingly. "It isn't my worry, anyway."

"So far as the necklace is concerned," Charles repeated, "I frankly admit that I stole it. My sister has married a very rich man and she has treated us all very badly. I think that she owes us money. I had a chance to get quits by stealing the necklace and I did it. If, at any time, the theft were brought home to me, neither you nor I would get into trouble. There would be no prosecution. It would be a family affair and it would be hushed up. But as regards the murder," Charles concluded, his voice losing a

little of its self-assured ring—"that is a different thing. With that I had nothing to do. Nobody could ever connect me with it, anyway."

Mr. Felix Main stroked his sandy moustache. His eyes had narrowed a little.

"If it makes you feel any better to talk like that, Mr. de Suess," he said, "why, go on as long as you like, only, between you and me, is it worth while?"

"I won't have you believe that you've got that over me," Charles shouted. "No, keep your damned wine," he added, as the other approached with the bottle. "No one is going to blackmail me, now or at any other time."

Felix Main was shocked. He very nearly put the bottle down but Charles, who had apparently changed his mind, held out the glass.

"Blackmail is not a word, Mr. de Suess," his host remonstrated, "to be mentioned between gentlemen. The very idea between us is unthinkable. Your position is a peculiar one, Mr. de Suess. It possesses great possibilities, but you need help. You will need help all the time. You could never have found any one more suitable than I. For one thing, I dislike very much your brother-in-law. I think you and your family are unjustly treated. When a man is unjustly treated he must set the matter right himself. He owes it to himself. A top on your glass, Mr. de Suess."

Charles drained his glass and stood up. His eyes rested covetously upon the necklace.

"I do not like to leave those diamonds with you," he acknowledged bluntly.

"There is no help for it," Mr. Main pointed out. "As a matter of fact, it is to your advantage. I shall know how to keep them safely, and as soon as the trial is over and Drayton is hanged, we will get to work with the larger stones."

The young man turned away with a little shiver.

"Very well," he muttered. "Remember I shall want some money on Thursday."

"You shall have some money on Thursday," the detective promised him.

As soon as his visitor had departed, Felix Main relocked the door. For five minutes he held the necklace in his hand, passing it slowly back and forth, studying every stone. Then he went to the telephone, searched through the book, and rang up Glenlitten House.

"Does his lordship happen to be in this evening?" he enquired of the butler who answered it.

"His lordship is just going out—in the hall now." was the reply.

"Ask him to speak to me for a moment, will you?"

"What name?"

Mr. Felix Main hesitated.

"I am speaking from the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard," he announced confidentially.

The man withdrew. In a moment Andrew took his place.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Sorry to trouble you, my lord," Felix Main apologised, trying to disguise his voice and make it sound as official as possible, "but we wanted to know the exact amount of the reward offered for the return of the Glenlitten necklace?"

"Any news of it?" Andrew asked quickly.

"Can't go quite so far as that, my lord, but we wish to know the amount of the reward."

"I thought I made that clear when I saw the Inspector," was the curt reply. "Ten thousand pounds."

"I am much obliged to you, my lord," Felix Main said, and rang off.

He went back to the table. For a long time he stood there, letting the little stream of diamonds pass, one by one, through his fingers. It was not until the hour drew near for his wife's return that he found the heart to part with them. Then he descended the stairs, opened up his office, hid the necklace in a secret cavity of his safe, and went thoughtfully back to his rooms.

CHAPTER XXV

It was a bad time for pheasants at Glenlitten, a good time for the cartridge makers, for the keepers, for the patients in hospitals who were the recipients of most of the game shot. Some of the guests departed, but others took their places. Sir Richard, deeply engaged in a great blackmail case, had been forced to leave but was expected back. Philip had arrived, with the full intention of staying some time, and Félice was not allowed to have a dull moment. Twenty miles southward, a man in Winchester jail spent days of horror and nights cold and clammy with fear. He suffered the terrors of the rope a dozen times over. It was fear more than illness which kept him in the hospital. The physician and chaplain talked to him in vain. He was a man beside himself—unreasonable, incoherent in his abuse and declamations.

"There's some one done it on me about that revolver," he kept on insisting. "I've never hurt man, woman or child in my life, but if I knew who it was, I'd tear the b . . . y heart out of him. Some devil going free, with all those diamonds safely hidden away, and me jugged here. And that's not enough, but they must try to make me swing for what I never did."

"You brood too much over your sin," the chaplain told him. "Try and make your peace, so that if the worst comes—"

"Leave off!" the frantic man interrupted. "Leave off, I tell you! That one wasn't mine. I never killed no one. If I swing for it—for what I never did—what's the good of your God to me? If the truth comes out, and the murderer is caught, then you can talk religion to me if you want to. I may believe then there may be summat in what you're preaching about, but I can't believe it if I'm going to be done out of this world because some one else put that chap's light out. Quit it, Guv'nor. I'll do my five years all right. You come and talk the Lord Almighty to me then. I'll listen, I promise you—but I've got to know first—I've got to know."

The man made an impression upon those immediately around him. Even Major Hartopp, the Chief Constable, was affected by his ceaseless repudiations. One day, shooting with Andrew, he spoke about it.

"That poor chap Drayton gets worse and worse," he remarked, as they were sitting around after lunch in one of the keepers' cottages. "He owns up about the burglary all right. He's going to plead guilty to that, but he goes off his head when any one speaks of the killing part of it. He would have heard through his lawyer, of course, sooner or later, about the finding of the revolver, but one of the warders let it out, and he's pretty nearly crazy about it."

"Are you going to hang him?" Haslam asked.

"I'm afraid so," the Chief Constable admitted. "I'm not a sentimentalist, but if there's anything in

the world I hate it's a hanging. We haven't had one at Winchester for years."

"Can't hate it more than I do," Manfield declared gloomily. "Thank God for under sheriffs."

"Lady Glenlitten seems to have been very good to the poor fellow's wife," Hartopp observed, turning towards his host. "He gets perfectly inarticulate when he speaks about her."

Andrew nodded.

"Félice is terribly upset about the whole affair," he confided. "I shouldn't mention it if I were you. It's a damned pity the lights were not up in the room when the tragedy occurred and she didn't see the whole thing, whatever it may have cost her at the time. As it is, she can't get it out of her mind that by some miraculous means or other another person fired that shot."

"Cotton hasn't given the case up," Hartopp said. "He's getting together quite a lot of testimony about the direction of the bullet and that sort of thing. All the same, unless further evidence is produced, I'm afraid it will be rather difficult to convince a jury that Drayton isn't the man."

"Don't say that, for God's sake, before Félice," Andrew begged, as they walked to their stands.

"Over on the left!"

A high cock pheasant, rising as he flew at a tremendous speed, caught Manfield swinging a shade too slowly, and escaped. Glenlitten grinned.

"Does these swagger shots good to miss a bird

now and then," he remarked. "Here's your place, Hartopp. Follow on to the right afterwards, for the next stand."

Andrew himself plunged along a narrow drive into the heart of the wood, intending to come down on the outside of the beaters. He decided to let the birds go back after a certain point and, adjusting his stick, sat and waited. He was in the very midst of the wood, soundless, except for a slight ripple of breeze every now and then amongst the tree tops. It was like the silence before the storm, as though every species of animal knew of the terror to come and had already found its hiding place. Even a squirrel, after a plucky display of indifference at his motionless presence, dashed away. Andrew, subconsciously aware of his detachment, found his thoughts wandering. A new gravity stole into his face as he sat and pondered. There was something wrong with Félice—therefore there was something wrong with the world. After months of buoyant, gloriously infectious happiness, she was suddenly looking out upon life with different eyes—eyes that were sometimes heavy with fear. She made a brave show. She was still apparently the light-hearted hostess, gay and sparkling, popular with every one, adored by her few intimates—but he knew. There was something behind it all, something which swept over her in such quiet moments as he himself was now experiencing. There was something in her mind which she was keeping to herself. That was what hurt him. He had so

easily discovered all her little troubles when first they had been married. A carelessly lost pocketbook one day, an exorbitant milliner's bill, trifles which she had confided sweetly enough after a few hours' worrying. But this was different. He tried so hard to look at the matter clearly. It was something which concerned that poor fellow Drayton, tortured in his prison by horrible fears, which concerned too, somewhere or other, somehow or other, that tall, silent youth who had come to give Félice a dancing lesson and whom he had discovered— Ugh! His confidence in his wife was illimitable, but the memory of that moment was a revolting one. Indirectly, Haslam seemed to be in it too, although one could not tell exactly where. And there was Dick Cotton, still full of his chivalrous admiration of Félice, and yet with some sort of understanding with her from which he was excluded. Charles de Suess was the mystery figure in the picture. So far as he knew, so far as he could possibly tell, Félice had met him for the first time the night when he had been brought to the house by Fraser and Philipson. Yet, was that the first time they had met? Félice's attitude towards the young man had always been a little curious. So far as he could remember, they had barely exchanged more than a few words on that first visit, although she had danced with him, and there was nothing whatever in the manner of either of them to denote any previous acquaintance. At the Legation, she had certainly been startled at seeing him, but that, as a

matter of fact, was easily comprehensible. She had been unwilling to dance, he remembered. It was he who had pressed her into it. And then the dancing lesson, over which he had brooded so often—the dancing lesson, his interruption of which, he subtly felt, might a few minutes before or afterwards have resulted in drama. His thoughts travelled still farther back, to the time when he had almost carried the child from the roadside to her hospital, from there to a nursing home, and afterwards to the altar. She had been eighteen years old then. What time or opportunity had there been for her to make friendships? With Madame de Sandillac dead, there had been few people with whom he could speak of her ward, but on one point those few were agreed. There were no visitors at the Sandillac château. Félice had not even been to boarding school. Governesses had arrived and gone. It was impossible that she should have had friendships in that sheltered life of which she had told him nothing. And since then it was even more impossible. Félice's chief charm to him had been not only her dislike of, but her absolutely contemptuous refusal of anything approaching solitude, especially so far as he was concerned. She had refused to be left alone. If he had played polo she must be there to watch; cricket —even cricket she dozed through, with her hand in her husband's if he were not playing, her puzzled eyes upon the game if he were. Always she said the same thing: "I have been alone all my life. There is so much to make up for. You must never leave

me." And he never had left her. Whatever they had done, they had done together. Not for a single night since their marriage had they slept under different roofs. Where then was this mystery born? Whence did it come? It could be nothing, he told himself resolutely, which could possibly cause him a moment's uneasiness. Nevertheless, for her sake, although he had kept silent for so long, it was a mystery to be cleared up as gently and tactfully as possible. . . .

Then came the rush of the world again, the immediately practical world in which he was living, the sound of the tapping of sticks, faint at first, but becoming insistent. The whistle blew. A cock pheasant, on its way to freedom, soared across the drive and fell with a heavy flop. He marked it with a quick glance, beckoned to his loader who was standing a little way off, took his other gun and was absorbed once more in the sport of the hour. At the end of the drive he came upon Félice, waiting for him rather dejectedly at the top of the avenue.

"I did walk down behind every stand," she complained, "and you were not there."

He handed his gun to his loader and passed his arm through hers,

"Dearest," he explained, "some one, you see, must walk with the beaters. Most people prefer a stand. When you are a host, you must take these outside things. That is why I was not in sight. Now at the

next drive I will take a stand, and we will sit there together."

"Did you have any shooting?" she asked. "Every one is so excited, and happy. Sir Richard shot a woodcock which they all had missed. And Lord Manfield told me that he had two rights and lefts with cocks. Is that right? I could see them fall, and they were wonderful birds."

Andrew sent his loader to direct the other guns and turned down a grass-grown path leading through a strip of meadow land into another wood. As they passed through the gate, he bent down and met her eagerly offered lips. So soft they were, so tremulous, so loving, even in that hasty moment, that they brought the tears to his eyes. To think that any man could be fool enough to doubt for a single second any one so marvellous as Félice!

"Little sweetheart," he whispered, "I am worried about you."

"About me?" she protested. "But why?"

"I cannot tell you," he answered, a little sadly. "I am not clever. I just see what my eyes see, and I cannot help fancying that ever since the night when you lost your necklace you have been a little troubled in your heart. There have been moments when you have been even more than troubled; you have been frightened. Why are you so anxious to help this man Drayton who must have terrified you almost to death? Why have you and Dick Cotton talked so much and so gravely together? If you have kept a

little secret from me, sweetheart, I don't mind. I am not afraid of any secret you could carry in your heart. Let it be there, but I want you to know that your happiness is my happiness, and for that reason when I see you not quite gay, your eyes not quite so full of sunshine, your feet not quite so light upon the ground, why, then I have a great, clumsy, awkward desire to pick you up in my arms and to kiss you until you tell me what there is in the world I can do or have done, so that you are yourself again—little Félice—my wife!"

She was crying softly to herself, clinging to his arm, making no effort to stem the tears, using no handkerchief, frantically anxious, as it seemed, that her arms should not leave his. She leaned over and wiped her face against the brown homespun of his clothes. They had arrived now at the line of sticks which indicated the places for the last stand.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "we will go to the far one. The names are upon the others. Bennett will show them to their places. We shall be just round the corner and quite alone. Perhaps you may find something to say to me."

A hare scurried across the path. The gun which was being automatically raised to his shoulder was arrested by a word from her.

"It looked at me, the poor little thing," she cried, "and just now there is all kindness in my heart. You shall shoot those birds that fly so high, but not

those frightened creatures, not this time. Andrew, Andrew, you are so clever."

"My God!" he exclaimed. "No one has ever called me that before."

"Stupid!" she half laughed through her tears. "What I mean is that I know so well what you want to know, and I know that I ought to tell you, and I can't. That is what makes me unhappy; and what I am going to do I do not know. Perhaps you would like to send me back again to the Château de Sandillac where the rain comes through the roof and there are no fires nor any heating."

He shook his head.

"You're here for keeps, dear," he assured her, "and you know it, but I am jealous of every moment when the clouds gather in your eyes and you are not light-hearted. That is why I am going to be a little brutal. I am your lord and master, your husband, your protector as well as your lover. If there is anything causing you trouble, it is my right to demand the knowledge of it. What about that, child?"

"I rather like the sound of it," she confided. "Now I am beginning to know your rules. The whistle has blown; you will sit on your seat, and here is Bennett coming to stand behind you with two cartridges between his thumb and finger, and with another gun. You have not frightened me, Andrew. I suppose I ought to have a terribly guilty feeling inside me, but I have not. Now you must shoot as

the Lord of Glenlitten should shoot, and I shall stand behind like your dutiful wife."

Félice dropped behind just in time, for the birds began to come over freely. It was the last drive of the day and the best. Andrew shot his pheasants well, but he was proudest of all of the six woodcocks collected from his gun. Bennett drew out the little pin feathers of the first, and Félice stuck them in the band of her hat.

"Drinks at the game cart," the host called out. "The cars are on the top road."

They made their way out of the wood. Andrew handed his gun to his loader.

"Any other living creature that we meet shall live," he declared. "I shall walk with you, dear Félice, and you shall tell me just what is troubling you, and if I have to raise the roof from Glenlitten, or pawn Glenlitten Castle and become my own head-keeper, it shall be done, if we find it necessary."

She clung again to his arm.

"Dear Andrew," she admitted, looking anxiously up into his face, "you are right, as you are always right. There is something between me and happiness. And this is the most terrible thing of all, this is what makes it worse and worse and worse—I cannot tell you what it is."

He paused and lit a cigarette. The matter demanded reflection.

"You cannot tell me what it is," he repeated. "That must be then for the sake of some other per-

son. Félice, I cannot think of any circumstances in the world in which you and I would not think and act alike. Therefore, I am sure that you are making a mistake—in not telling me."

"I have sworn upon the Ikon of St. Joseph," she said tearfully, "that I will keep silent until the time comes."

"Well, that's something at any rate," he remarked. "If you have sworn upon the Ikon of St. Joseph it is an oath you have made to some member or members of your family. You see, I know enough Russian for that. What harm should I do to your family? If there are any of them who need help, could you find any one in the world more eager than I? From what I have gathered from you, and from what De Bressac was saying the other night, I understand that there were very few, if any, survivors. If there are, dear, they will find your husband only too eager and proud to be their friend."

She began to tremble.

"Andrew," she faltered, "I never said anything about my family. I should not have mentioned the Ikon of St. Joseph. You must not take it for granted, please, that it is my family who are concerned."

"Is Charles de Suess a relative of yours?" he asked.

She clung to him. There was an almost defiant light in her eyes.

"This is not my fault," she cried. "I have not told you. You ask me a question. It cannot be

helped. No one could make me promise to lie to you. Yes, Charles de Suess is related to me."

Andrew pointed along the path. Coming towards them through the wood, a curiously out-of-place figure in his town clothes, bowler hat and patent shoes, walking with the haste of a man engaged on serious business, slipping a little sometimes as his feet hurried over the muddy surface, came Charles de Suess, and it was clear from his features, his expression, in the speed of his coming, that somewhere in the background terrible things were stirring.

CHAPTER XXVI

As he drew nearer, it became apparent that something serious had indeed befallen the young man who had made so unexpected an appearance. Although the evening was chilly, he was bathed in perspiration, as though with rapid walking. His boots and trousers were splashed with mud. There was a curiously hunted expression about his eyes. He tried to pull himself together when he came face to face with Félice and her husband, but it was, after all, only a half-hearted attempt.

"What on earth has happened, Charles?" Félice cried. "What are you doing down here?"

"I was obliged to see you," he replied. "You can tell your husband, if you like, who we are. The reason for secrecy is removed. We are in great danger."

"This is my brother Charles," Félice said simply. "For some cause, which I have never understood, he and my father insisted upon it that I kept their existence secret. Now you will know everything, Andrew, and it will be a great relief to me."

Andrew smiled pleasantly at the young man.

"I should have been very happy to have met my brother-in-law at any time," he assured him cordially. "I suppose you had some reason for not wishing to be known."

"We had indeed," Charles groaned. "There was a very terrible reason."

They had reached the main avenue. Behind them the rest of the party were catching them up.

"As the story has kept so long, it will keep a little longer," Andrew observed. "You and I and Félice will have a talk as soon as we've had some tea or a drink, eh?"

"As quickly as possible, if you please," the young man begged uneasily. "I must go back to London to-night. I have a taxicab waiting, and the train leaves the Junction in an hour."

"Well, we'll make a certainty of that for you," Andrew promised. "My people shall send your taxi away, and we'll have a car round for you in twenty minutes."

"You are very kind," the young man murmured.

"I'll just start the others off," Andrew concluded, "and we'll have a chat in my study. Take him straight there, Félice, and look after him."

He waved them away and, retracing his steps, joined the rest of his guests. He took his brother's arm.

"What's Félice hurrying away with that Russian chap for?" the latter demanded.

"It seems that he is some sort of a connection of hers and in trouble—or rather his family is. I don't exactly understand the position as yet. Will you look after every one whilst I go and talk to him."

"Good God! That young fellow a connection of Félice!" Philip exclaimed. "Well, I daresay he's all

right," he added, recovering himself a little. "Quite a good-looking chap."

Andrew nodded and presently made his way to the study where tea was laid out and Charles was already drinking a huge brandy and soda. He threw himself into an easy-chair, and Félice gave him some tea.

"Now then, young fellow, let's have the story," he enjoined, a pleasant ring of invitation in his tone. "You can count on me beforehand to do anything I can to help any of Félice's people."

"That is very good of you, sir," the young man acknowledged, taking another eager gulp of his brandy and soda. "The whole trouble we are in is that word has reached Moscow that my father is alive."

"Well, does that matter?" Andrew asked, a little puzzled.

"Does it matter?" Charles gasped.—"But I forgot, you don't know—I daresay Félice didn't know herself—our real name."

"I did not," Félice replied. "Madame de Sandillac promised often to tell me, but she never did. I was married under the name of Félice Protinoff."

Charles nodded.

"That is just a family name," he admitted, "as also is De Suess, but in the earlier days of the war there was no name in Russia so famous as ours, and no one so much dreaded by the people as our father. I got him out of the country and over the frontier

by a miracle. They believed that he was already dead. I escaped from Austria and got back to Russia just in time for the horror, but just in time also to save his life."

Andrew nodded sympathetically.

"A rotten time it must have been for all of you," he said; "but tell me what is the urgent trouble for the moment?"

"The Soviet Government has found out that we are here, living in London, and that my father is alive. They do not dare to publish the news, but they mean having him and all of us. We had word yesterday from a monarchist friend of my father's, who sent us a letter at the risk of his life, that eleven members of the 'Scarlet Vests' are on their way over."

"And who the devil are the 'Scarlet Vests'?" Andrew demanded.

Charles gulped down the last of his brandy and soda.

"They are a sort of secret society," he explained, "but in reality they are subsidized and supported by the Bolshevist Government. They have a list of names, added to day by day and week by week. I reckon if your name appears on that list, you are a doomed person. My father's has been there longer than any one's. They are aching to wipe it off. They have added mine now, and my brother Paul's, and my sister Anna's. They will add Félice's too, if they get to know about her."

"Do you suggest seriously," Andrew expostulated, with a note of incredulity in his tone, "that these members of the—what did you call them?—Scarlet Vest Society are on their way here to assassinate all of you?"

"Of course I do," was the half-impatient, half-nervous reply. "They are all over Europe, these fellows. There is not a week that some one does not die at their hands. Latinoff was the last, in Paris a fortnight ago. He was murdered one night in the Boulevard Haussmann. 'A Russian refugee' was all they had to say about it. He was one of the Chief Justices in our Law Courts. Three months ago he was instrumental in getting one of our Grand Dukes crowned Czar of all the Russias at a château near Cannes! He wrote his name into the book with his own hand when he did that. He was a dead man within six weeks. I could tell you a dozen others, if there were time, but what does it matter? Any Russian knows that the 'Scarlet Vests' are the most terrible organization in the country."

"Well, what can I do?" Andrew asked. "Shall I use my influence with the Government to have you protected, or shall I go to the Home Office to try to prevent these fellows being allowed to land? I have influence here and there—anything you tell me—I'm at your service."

The young man set his teeth.

"It's money we want," he declared bluntly. "Police protection perhaps to reach Southampton or

Liverpool—but money to get to America at once—all of us."

"That," Andrew assured him, "is the easiest thing of all. How many are there of you?"

"My father and myself," Charles replied—"my stepmother doesn't count—we should leave her behind—and there is Anna, my sister, and Paul, my younger brother. Four in all. For years," he went on, helping himself once more to brandy and soda, "we have lived in terror that this thing might one day happen. It is for this reason we made Félice swear that she should keep secret even from her husband our real names. Yet we have been betrayed somehow or other. We know for certain—we still have some good friends—one even in Moscow itself—we know for certain that they have started—eleven of them—with one idea. It will be my father first, afterwards the rest of us."

"Not a chance!" Andrew asserted cheerfully. "We'll get you over to America before they reach here. Now let me see," he reflected, "what would be the easiest way to arrange this? You had better catch your train this afternoon and let your people know our plans. I will motor up to London to-night and get you tickets on the White Star steamer leaving to-morrow night from Southampton. I'll bring the tickets to the house, meet your people, and see you off. If you like, I'll drop Scotland Yard a hint, and I think I can promise that you won't be molested."

Félice, who had been sitting upon the arm of his chair, clasped his hand tightly.

"Andrew, can you really do this?" she cried breathlessly. "What about your guests here?"

"Philip can look after them for a couple of days," Andrew assured her. "Of course I can do it. Do you think I should like to have your father leave the country without a word from me? You can rely upon my doing all that I have promised," he continued, turning to Charles, "but frankly, if you weren't Félice's brother, I should feel bound to say that your story sounds more like a film play than anything actually happening in real life. I rather thought that since that abortive raid, all this talk about the Bolshevists being such wholesale murderers had died away."

The young man shuddered.

"Don't you believe it for a minute," he begged. "Only last month there was an old man of seventy-seven, a non-politician, perfectly harmless, murdered. He had risked going back to look for his sister, who had left off writing to him a few years ago. He was a monarchist, it is true, but all the time he was in England he had never opened his mouth, never attended a single political meeting. He was simply dragged out of the train the moment he had crossed the frontier and shot within a few hours. They hide things more now, sir, but they are just as bloodthirsty as ever they were."

"Well, anyhow," Andrew declared, rising to his

feet and lighting a cigarette, "your friends may be deceiving you, or they may not. The story begins and ends, so far as I am concerned, with the fact that you are all Félice's relatives and that you need help. Any aid my name or banking account can give you is yours. Félice and I will motor to London to-night. I will go to the steamship office as soon as it is open, and she shall bring me round to see you later in the day. In the meanwhile, by the grace of providence," he continued, strolling across towards his desk, "I have plenty of money in the house. If you're short, you had better take a couple of hundred pounds with you."

"I have enough money for my ticket back, and that's all," Charles confessed. "We ought to buy some clothes to-morrow morning. Anna will want some things too."

"Naturally," Andrew agreed. "Take these notes now, then, and anything else you want you can have to-morrow. We'll talk then about your plans when you get to the States. I am fortunately not a poor man, and I shall hope to explain to your father myself that for Félice's sake he can give me no greater pleasure than to accept my help. The only thing I'm sorry about is that I didn't know of this before."

"It might have been better," the young man admitted, "but when you have talked to my father you will understand. We passed through such a terrible time, he has lived so long as a hunted man, that when at last we had found a hiding place, the idea of let-

ting any other human being in the world into the secret of his identity simply paralysed him with fear."

Andrew glanced out of the window.

"Well, there's no use talking about it now," he said. "The car's waiting for you. Your taxicab's paid and sent off, and you've just comfortable time to catch the train. We'll be up to-night. Parkins can telephone Curzon Street to let us have just two or three rooms," he suggested, turning to Félice. "Not worth while opening the whole house. See you to-morrow, Charles."

He touched the bell. The young man, with an attempt at his usual manner, finished the rest of his brandy and soda, bent over Félice's fingers and kissed them, shook hands with Glenlitten, and was escorted outside. After the car had driven off, Félice and Andrew returned to the library, and Félice, with a great happiness shining out of her face, threw her arms around her husband's neck.

"Oh, why did they not let me tell you before!" she sobbed. "You do not know what a difference it makes. Whatever happens now there is nothing between us."

He kissed her fondly.

"Félice," he said, "at no time, under any circumstances, whatever might have happened or whatever may happen, could anything come between us. It did give me rather a shock to see that young man offering you brotherly attentions that time I blundered in upon your dancing lesson, but I'm one of

those pig-headed Saxons, you know," he went on, "who, when they really care, don't believe the evidence of their eyes or of any one else's eyes. The result shows how right I was, you see. We'll get these people of yours safely out of the country, if that is what they want," he added, taking her by the arm and leading her towards the door, "although I fancy I could make things all right for them here. Still, if they want to go to America, they shall, and if they want a good start out there, why, they shall have it. You know that. I can perhaps do more for them there even than here. You'd better get ready at once, dear. We'll have a scratch meal on the way up. I'll go and explain. Thank goodness, we haven't got a houseful of women."

Félice slipped up the back stairs, and Andrew wandered off to make his peace with his guests. Philip, to whom he confided the whole story, was frankly astonished.

"So that fellow was really Félice's brother!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Awful what bloomers one can make! I always thought he was a dead wrong 'un."

"Can't judge these foreigners by externals as you can an Englishman," Andrew declared sagely.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was exactly midday when Andrew rang the bell at the gloomy looking house at the corner of Milden Square. Félice clung convulsively to his arm. There was a faint repugnance in her face, the shadow of something mysterious, almost a subconscious fear.

"You are not going to like them, Andrew," she warned him pitifully. "Sometimes—it is very terrible, I know, and unnatural—but I do not like them very well myself. They frighten me. They have been through so much that they seem to have lost courage."

"I expect they've had a pretty rough time, dear," was Andrew's consoling reminder. "You can't live in poverty and in fear of your life for ten or twelve years without showing signs of it. We aren't going to see much of them, anyway. The steamer sails tomorrow."

The door was opened by Anna. She had been mercifully sparing with cosmetics, and though her eyes met Andrew's boldly and her manner showed little reserve, she was certainly not at her worst.

"Please come in," she begged. "So you are my brother-in-law. I think that Félice is very lucky."

He shook hands.

"And I," he rejoined, "think I am."

She led the way into the long, fusty apartment which Félice hated. There were signs of some effort to make it presentable. The window had been opened,

cigarette ends had been collected and carted away, but the stains upon the table, the holes in the carpet, the displeasing public-house odour of stale drinks and tobacco remained. Serge Protinoff, with his high forehead and untidy hair, his steel spectacles and scraggly grey beard, seemed as ungainly and terrible as ever. His linen, carefully selected for him by Paul, was almost passable, but he wore carpet slippers, and his frock coat was a shapeless and horrible garment. Paul, looking a little less flashy than usual, pushed a book away and rose to his feet. Clara Protinoff, blowsy, untidy, the upper part of her dress unfastened, the eternal samovar in front of her, looked across the room in scarcely friendly fashion. Intuitively, she felt that the coming of these people meant no good for her.

"I am very glad to know you all," Andrew greeted them simply. "I should like to explain that it is entirely owing to Félice's wishes that I have not made your acquaintance before."

"We thought it best," Serge Protinoff explained, holding out his knobby hand. "My wife, my daughter Anna, my son Charles, we thought it best," he continued in his harsh voice, "that there should be no meeting at present. We left Russia, son-in-law, under very terrible circumstances. Not only were we stripped of the whole of our possessions, but to save my family, to escape at all, I was forced to kill. All that we have prayed for is that we might remain hidden here. We feared that if the connection be-

tween Félice and ourselves and you were established, we should no longer be able to remain in concealment. Now, however, what we dreaded has come to pass. We have been discovered."

"I won't ask you for the whole story," Andrew said in friendly fashion, accepting the chair which Paul had placed for him, "but if there was any way of arranging matters for you through the Government, I have some influence politically, and something might be done. I know nothing of the circumstances, and I don't wish for any more of your confidence than you choose to offer me, but I can assure you of this. There is no crime which you as a monarchist may have committed against the Bolshevist Government which could possibly result in your extradition."

Protinoff shook his head.

"I shall tell the truth," he declared, looking round. "I shall tell the truth to my son-in-law. I killed a man to get free—a highly placed Bolshevist official —a relative of the arch-murderer himself. This is what happened. We had reached the frontier in such disguises as we could lay our hands upon. By some means or other, I became suspect. I was ushered into the office of this man for a private examination. I believe that he thought I still had millions, and that he might squeeze something out of me before I was shot. With his first sentence I knew that I was discovered, and discovery meant death as certainly as the death which befell Nicholas himself. I acted for

the others as well as for myself. I killed him. I stole every penny of money there was in the office, and I forged a pass. That is the gist of the whole story. The Under Commissioner, the two officers in charge, and a dozen soldiers were shot on suspicion of having aided my escape. Then my name was added to the black list of the 'Scarlet Vests.' You know what that means?"

"Yes," Andrew admitted dubiously. "Your son Charles told us yesterday."

"No government, no influence, has any power against these people," Serge Protinoff continued, stroking his stubbly chin. "They are on my track at this moment, hurrying across Europe for fear I should escape. That is why I throw myself upon your generosity, son-in-law, and that is why America is my only hope."

"Well, there's nothing to stop your reaching New York all right," Andrew assured him. "Your tickets are here, for the steamer starting to-morrow. The train goes down from Waterloo to-night. Your passports, I presume, you have. You could sleep on board and you will find quite comfortable quarters. It is a very fine ship. Félice has some money for you which I have drawn from my bankers this morning, and when you arrive in New York, if you will cable your address, I will see that a reasonable allowance is paid to you through my bankers."

The old man was plainly overcome. Even in his gratitude, however, he was repulsive-looking.

"You have married a prince, Félice!" he declared.

Anna was laughing—curiously, and in a sense miserably. Andrew glanced at her in puzzled fashion. A more inhuman lot of people he had never seen in his life. And the girl—one moment she was looking at him wistfully and longingly out of her really beautiful eyes, the next moment her shoulders would turn from him, and she was indulging in a sort of hysteria.

"Is Charles not here?" Félice asked timidly.

"He is never here if he can help it. If he were not so frightened for his skin, he would not be going with us at all," Anna replied bitterly.

"I do not wish to defend Charles," Félice said. "By your own desire, I know little about the lives of any of you, but you have had small sums of money lately. I think perhaps you might have made even this home more attractive to him. It would only have needed a slight effort."

Anna shrugged her shoulders.

"Why should one bother?" she demanded. "Charles makes use of the house when it suits him. When he has any money, he stays away. I do the the same. What is the good of pretending? We are all too miserable to do anything else except hate one another. We are the sort of family you read about in the crazy, hopeless novels of our country people," she went on, looking defiantly at Andrew. "You don't believe in us, but we exist. You throw the book down and say how sordid and wretched, but we are there

all right. I hope you are going to make me a good allowance, brother-in-law. I shall spend it all on clothes and food and wine, and go on living just as I do here, only I shall pick and choose. That is all the promise of reformation you'll get from me."

Clara Protinoff, who understood little English, tried in vain to follow the discussion. She spoke in thick Russian to her husband, who took no notice. Then the door opened quickly, and Charles entered. He closed it behind him. He was out of breath, shaking in every limb, stark fear in his eyes, pale with the bloodless terror of one who has seen death.

"We've got the steamer tickets," Protinoff announced, looking up exultantly from his study of them. "Here they are, Charles, for to-morrow, from Southampton. Félice, too, has money."

Charles had half collapsed across the table, breathing heavily. He raised his head, and his father knew the truth.

"Not him, Charles?" he cried loudly.

"Here! Outside! He stepped out of a car, was looking up at the numbers," the young man gasped, picking up the steamer tickets and dashing them down. "Too late! One day too late."

Andrew rose to his feet and came quickly forward to the table.

"What is this trouble?" he demanded. "Tell the truth, and we may be ready for it. Is it the police?"

The old man Protinoff's arms went up over his head.

"Worse," he groaned. "Worse than the police. If God would only strike me dead!"

A curious silence seemed to fall upon the whole room. The woman tipped the samovar towards her and mumbled something in Russian, whilst she poured out the yellow liquid. Then there was the sound of a slow tapping upon the door.

"Are these your 'Scarlet Vests?'" Andrew asked, bracing himself. "Is this a fight or what?"

The knocking was repeated. Then in the midst of the breathless silence, the door was slowly opened. A tall, elderly man entered—a man, grey-headed, with a thin, wan face, deep-set eyes, and certainly with little in his calm demeanour to inspire the terror which his coming had created. He leaned on his stick and looked round the room. His forefinger seemed to be counting the occupants. It pointed first to Serge Protinoff, who dropped on to his knees. The woman remained seated, with her mouth open, non-comprehending. The finger moved on. The girl too slid to her knees. Paul followed suit, then Charles. Félice and Andrew were blankly amazed spectators. Then suddenly Félice felt that she was being looked at as she had never been looked at in her life before. A strange mixture of feelings brought a sudden lump to her throat, an inclination to cry out, an impossibility of speech. The newcomer took a step forward. From the upper end of the room came Serge Protinoff's voice. He spoke in Russian, and the man who had entered understood.

"It is Félice. It is your daughter."

She crossed the floor, obeying one of those curious instincts which refuse to lend themselves to analysis. The stranger took her into his arms.

"Yes, you are Félice," he said. "Thank God, you are safe after all."

"But you?"

"I am your father," he announced. "I have been in prison in Russia for eleven years—thanks to that man," he added, turning his head once more towards Protinoff.

"But he told me that *he* was my father," Félice cried in amazement.

"He will answer before long for more crimes than that," the newcomer pronounced coldly. "Have you anything to say to me, you horde of reprobates, you false servants, you miserable lying troop of parasites? Anything to say to me, whom you hoped never to see again in this world?"

"Your Highness," Serge Protinoff sobbed, "there is nothing to say. Only this. The Princess I took myself safely to her destination. I betrayed you to Agonoff, the revolutionary inspector of the district. My own safety was the price. As to the money, we kept it all. We left the Princess with nothing, except what she had from Madame de Sandillac. We paid her nothing. After her marriage—"

"Her what?" was the passionate interruption.

"I do not know who you are, sir," Andrew intervened, "but I am your daughter's husband. We have

been married a year. I met her in France. It was my motor which was responsible for the accident when Madame de Sandillac was killed. We were married a month afterwards. I have done my best to make her happy. I think she will tell you that she is happy. As for this crowd, Félice believed that they were all her relatives. Somehow or other they managed to make her swear that she would never let me into the secret of their existence. They were afraid, of course, that they might be traced through her, or that I should discover, as I, of course, soon would have done, that they were frauds. It was only yesterday that I came into this affair at all. Charles rushed down with some wild story as to their being persecuted by a Bolshevist revolutionary society and appealed for help. I bought them tickets for America and was sending them off there to-morrow."

The two men looked into each other's eyes. The newcomer drew a sigh of relief. The wave of passionate anger which had flooded his face subsided.

"It is a blow to me," he acknowledged, "to find my daughter married. Félice is very young. You can guess the story. I saw the storm coming, sent her away to safety, and trusted this horde of reprobates with fifty thousand pounds for Madame de Sandillac. She was to keep it for her. You see what has happened. As for them—"

Once more he looked scornfully around at the cowering figures cringing before him.

"Félice," he expostulated, "do you mean that you

could think seriously that these people were your relatives?"

"I was four years old," she reminded him, "when I left Russia. I simply knew that their faces were familiar to me. That is all I could ever remember."

"Serge Protinoff was my steward, and these my servants, before the revolution," her father explained. "The family had a farm on one of my southern estates. I trusted that man Protinoff, simply because I had to trust somebody, for the storm came suddenly, and I was to have been one of its first victims."

Félice held his arm. There was ecstasy in her eyes and joy in her quivering tone.

"But this is wonderful!" she cried. "It is such a weight from my heart, what you tell me, for they all frightened me so. But now I know that I am safe, dear father, and very, very happy—happier now than ever."

Andrew glanced round the room at the shivering little crowd. Dimly he seemed to understand the queer, inherited terror of the rod which for generations had swayed the Russian peasant. They were still like stricken creatures.

"What about that story of your escape?" he asked Serge Protinoff.

"False, every word of it," was the trembling admission. "I never killed anybody in my life. I never had the courage. It was the terror of yesterday's news which brought Charles to you. We saw in the papers—that *he* had arrived in London—and we

knew then that concealment was no longer any use."

"The Grand Duke Carol?" Andrew exclaimed.

Félice's father inclined his head.

"That is my name," he said. "According to the papers, I disappeared the second day of the revolution. My disappearance was to a fortress at Odessa. I have been near to death a hundred times, but I had great estates down there, and, although I had always been an ardent supporter of my relative Nicholas, I treated my people well, and sometimes when there were rumours that I was to be killed, they half stormed the prison. It is my own people who managed my escape," he concluded.

There was a short silence. Serge Protinoff buried his face in his hands. Anna was sobbing. Charles was seated at the table, his head supported by his hands. Andrew was suddenly conscious of a wave of contemptuous pity for them all.

"Look here, sir," he ventured, addressing his newly discovered father-in-law, "I don't know what you want to do about these people, but they don't seem worth powder and shot to me. There are the tickets for America, everything arranged. Why not let them go—clear them out of the country and not be bothered with them again. Félice didn't suffer, except that she was poor all her girlhood. She's all right now, and they haven't fallen on any specially good times."

Protinoff looked up with a gleam of hope in his watery eyes.

"The money did me no good," he groaned. "Everything I touched was loss, loss, loss. We have been penniless now for months, except for what Félice brought us."

The newcomer held up his hand, palm outwards. They all stumbled to their feet.

"My son-in-law has spoken," he said. "Out of this country as fast as train and steamboat can get you! Never let me see the face of any one of you again. On that condition, you can go free. . . . Come, Félice! Come, my son-in-law!"

They hurried out into the street, Félice clinging to her father's arm. Andrew led the way to his car.

"My God, what an atmosphere!" he exclaimed, opening his cigarette case. "Won't you try one of these, sir?"

His father-in-law accepted with a smile.

"I see," he said gravely, "that my daughter has married an Englishman indeed. I have known many of your country people. They thrive always on fresh air and open windows."

"You knew my father, sir," Andrew told him. "He was at St. Petersburg, as it was then, in your time. I heard him speak of you often."

They stepped into the car. Behind them the family of Protinoff were recklessly throwing everything they possessed into bags and trunks.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Mr. Felix Main, for the twentieth time that afternoon, pulled out from the drawer of his writing table a small, brightly polished automatic pistol. He examined the catch, charged and uncharged it, tried to remember the instructions given him by the gunmaker that morning, and finally left it carefully loaded in the half-opened drawer. He was not a brave man, and it was an afternoon to which he looked forward with quaking fear. Every step on the stairs gave him a nervous tremor. At last the moment came. His little typist sauntered in.

"That tall young fellow's here," she announced. "What about it?"

"You can show him in," her employer directed, "but remember my instructions."

"That's all right," the girl assured him. "You're afraid he's going to cut up rough. If I hear a noise, I'm to fetch a policeman. I get a box of chocolates if the policeman gets here in time to save you from being laid out."

Mr. Felix Main shivered.

"You are very unfeeling, Mabel," he complained. "Do take this matter seriously. The young man is sure to fancy himself aggrieved. He is strong and young; I am neither. You don't want to come in and find me battered to death, do you?"

"I'll fetch the policeman like a streak," she promised. "Just bang the bell, that's all."

She departed, and a moment later Charles entered on her heels. He could scarcely wait for the door to be closed. So far it had been a wonderful morning. One of the great fears of their lives had been removed for ever. If only this other thing could be arranged.

"Have you done anything with the stones, Main?" he asked breathlessly.

"Very little as yet," the detective admitted, taking up a pencil and tracing some hieroglyphics on a scrap of paper. "Not much time, you see. These affairs—"

"Look here," Charles interrupted, "I have the chance to get away to America—passage bought and everything. Leaving to-morrow from Southampton. Once there, I shall drop away down south. I want to make a deal with you."

"In what way?" was the cautious query.

"The necklace is insured for thirty thousand pounds and is very likely worth far more," the young man continued. "You think you can probably get twenty thousand for it. That would be ten thousand each. Now, can you find five thousand certain to-day —well, before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning? If so, I'll give you the rest. There's a deal for you. With five thousand I can start down in Buenos Ayres—that's the place I want to get to. I know I'm safe here, thanks to your cleverness, but I've got nervous. I want to get right away from the whole thing. I don't want to see a newspaper, don't want

to know anything that happens. I want to wipe out this year from my mind altogether."

Mr. Felix Main scratched his chin reflectively.

"And this man Drayton," he questioned thoughtfully, "he is to hang then?"

Charles stared at him in amazement.

"What is the matter with you?" he demanded. "We've talked that out. The fellow was a burglar, anyhow. He'd have shot first if he could, I expect."

"He had no gun," Felix Main said slowly.

"What the hell are you talking about that for now?" Charles broke in angrily. "That's finished with. The thing is, can you raise five thousand pounds? If you can, the necklace is yours. You ought to clear at least fifteen thousand pounds."

Felix Main shook his head.

"No," he replied, "I could not find anything like such a sum. I am a very poor man, Mr. de Suess. Five thousand pounds is a great deal to me."

"Find me three then," Charles proposed, "and send the rest on."

"I cannot find you even three," the other declared, his right hand resting upon the drawer. "I cannot find you any more at all."

The young man glared at him across the table.

"Just what do you mean?" he demanded.

"I will explain," Felix Main said, his narrow eyes watching every movement of his *vis-à-vis*. "I have been very worried since you confided to me your story and the necklace—very worried indeed. In the

first place, in helping you to escape I am letting another man who is innocent, at any rate of this particular crime, be hanged. That is not a very good thing—not sporting, eh? In the second place, I am running a great risk in handling the disposal of this necklace, Mr. de Suess. There is nothing against me at police headquarters at present. I am a respectable man living a respectable life. I am summoned sometimes on the jury. I have my vote, my little house in the country. I have come to the conclusion, Mr. de Suess, that I must not risk my character in a transaction of this sort."

"Will you leave off talking b . . . y rot and tell me what you mean?" Charles interrupted thickly.

"I do not like your language, Mr. de Suess," Felix Main objected, "but I will tell you what I have determined to do. Scotland Yard is offering a reward of ten thousand pounds for the recovery of the necklace. I have recovered the necklace. I have decided to claim the reward and remain on the right side of the law."

Charles stared at him, still not fully comprehending all that was in the man's mind.

"But I never agreed to your doing anything of the sort," he protested. "We ought to get a lot more than that out of it. Besides, it is dangerous. From whom did you say that you had received the necklace?"

"Scotland Yard is never too inquisitive in matters of that sort," Felix Main murmured. "Besides, the

Marquis wants the necklace back very badly. It is an heirloom."

"Well, you had no right to make up your mind to do anything of the sort without consulting me," Charles grumbled, "but so long as it's done, I suppose it's done. What about my five thousand pounds? After all, perhaps this is the quickest way of touching the money."

"Your five thousand pounds?" the other queried gently.

Then the whole hideous truth dawned upon Charles. He half rose to his feet, and Mr. Felix Main's hand disappeared entirely now into the interior of the drawer.

"Do you mean that you are going to try to cheat me, that you are going to keep the necklace, collect the whole of the reward for yourself—*my* necklace, the necklace that I risked everything for?"

"I am going to keep the whole of the ten thousand pounds," Felix Main announced, with a coolness which surprised himself. "Now, what are you going to do about it? You cannot go to the law, and if you try to kill me, well, I shall kill you first."

The gun was out now, but a second later it was lying harmlessly upon the floor. Felix Main had made his calculations without taking into consideration his own very flabby nerve. His last words, the sight of the gun, and Charles was on him like a tiger. The arm from which the gun was wrenched was afterwards proved to be broken. Weakened though he was

by drink and debauches of every sort, at that moment the young Russian was as strong as a lion. He was across the desk, and Felix Main felt a grip upon his throat which was like the grip of death. His collar was burst away, Charles raised him up and shook him as an angry tiger might have done an offending jackal. Then he set him down for a moment, still with a grip like the grip of metal upon his throat.

"You're killing me!" Main gasped, the blood rushing up even to his eyes. "You're killing me!"

"My God, what else do you think I'm going to do?" the young man muttered, as he bent a little closer over his victim. "You spawn of the devil! You foul little cheat! Do you think I'm taking risks of my life and leaving you to mock at me? You are going to send me to the gallows, eh? And stick to the ten thousand pounds! A wonderful scheme, Mr. Felix Main. But you will never spend a penny of that ten thousand pounds. They will never let you take that with you down to hell."

The man was almost unconscious, a poor, lifeless pulp in the hands of his assailant.

"I'll pay—I'll give you all," he choked. "I'll tell nothing."

The young man laughed horribly. The natural cruelty of his race had asserted itself, and his blood was hot with the lust of killing. He lifted his victim up and shook him once more. Then he flung him on his back and leaned over him for a minute. What

happened then was spoken of at the inquest with bated breath.

The unfortunate part of the whole affair, so far as Mr. Felix Main was concerned, was that the struggle had been almost noiseless. Mabel was peacefully typing when Charles paused in her office on his way out, to light a cigarette.

"Well?" she asked pertly. "Finished with the guv'nor?"

"Pretty well," he answered. "Listen."

"I'm engaged for dinner, thanks," she replied—"but if it's at the Ritz, I'll put my boy off."

"I'm not asking you to dinner," he said, bending still closer over her. "I want one kiss."

She laughed and gave it to him.

"Thank you," he said. "Here's a little memento, as that's the last kiss I shall ever have."

He drew off his signet ring and laid it by her side. The girl stared after him as the swing door closed. Then the silence from the other room somehow frightened her. She went in, and her screams rang through the building.

CHAPTER XXIX

Andrew and Félice, as they lingered over dinner that night at Glenlitten House, could not conceal their astonishment at the way in which the latter's new-found relative seemed to have kept in touch with all modern changes and happenings. He smiled at one of his daughter's questions.

"You see," he explained, "I had a piece of great good fortune. I was imprisoned in a fortress within a mile or two of the castle on my own Karnoff estate. You would not remember it, Félice. How indeed would you remember anything," he added, with a whimsical smile, "when you left Russia at four years old? As a matter of fact, you never came to Karnoff. The district did not please your mother, but it was nevertheless a very wonderful estate, and one for which I had a great affection. I was always a very lenient overlord, and I believe that for many miles round the people had a genuine affection for me. When I came home wounded after winning those two great battles, and very nearly succeeding in smashing the Austrians before the Germans could arrive, they went crazy with delight. They used to come and sing outside my windows at night. I was fond of them too," he reflected, with a sudden touch of melancholy in his tone. "It is not a pleasant thing for an old man to remember that the Russia of those days exists no longer."

"I hope we will be able to show you that England

isn't such a bad place, sir," Andrew said, with hospitable emphasis.

The Grand Duke smiled.

"I never expected to feel my heart so much at ease again as it is this evening," he declared. "To see Félice just like her mother when I first met her in Paris, looking so happy, and you, my dear Andrew, the son-in-law so much after my heart, in this short time—when I think of what might have happened, owing to those scandalous servants of mine—well, it makes me believe once more in God."

He finished his wine and lit a cigarette.

"But I was beginning to tell you," he continued, "of my life at the prison. I had English, French and Russian newspapers every day, and all the magazines and many novels. I had my own food specially prepared, a garden for exercise, and the most exceptional privileges. Then after a time there came messages from the north that something had better happen to me, and, do you know, I believe I was the one man in Russia who was kept alive through the love of his people. There was a complete understanding between the warders, the outside workers at the fortress, and the people who used to be my labourers and who were living miserably as the labourers of some Bolshevist community—a complete understanding between them as to what should take place if anything were to happen to me. There was a beacon to be fired from the fortress, a flag to be hoisted at the castle, and I honestly believe I am not exagger-

ating when I tell you that every warder concerned in my murder, and every soldier there, the Governor himself, and every single official, would have been put to death. They dared not touch me. And yet with all that," he concluded, "the chances of escape seemed to be growing fewer and fewer."

"How did you manage it finally?" Andrew enquired.

"Please tell us," Félice pleaded.

"Until a certain great man is dead," her father answered, "I can never open my lips. I can only give you a hint. A great bird dropped one day in the gardens of the fortress—a bird that came across the Black Sea."

They obeyed his will and asked no more questions. Presently he rose to his feet.

"May I go?" he begged. "I am a little weary, and you two must have need of conversation together. To-morrow I shall come down and see this wonderful home of yours which Félice loves so much, son-in-law."

"Indeed I hope that you will, sir," Andrew assured him. "Félice will tell you, I think, that she has been very happy there."

The two men shook hands warmly.

"Believe me, I am very conscious of my good fortune," Félice's father acknowledged. "You have given happiness to my daughter. No man could earn a greater claim to my gratitude."

Félice and Andrew, arm in arm, made their way to the latter's den—a small comfortable apartment at the back of the house. Félice established herself by her husband's side on a huge divan and watched him light his pipe.

"I wonder whether you can imagine, dear, dear Andrew," she confided, "how happy I feel. It is as though a great weight had been rolled away from my heart. I have felt so wretched, so ashamed, every time I thought of those terrible people, and now to know that they do not exist, that they mean nothing to me —Andrew, that is so wonderful!"

"I should jolly well think so!" he exclaimed, his tone full of sympathy. "Of course, one had to do the best one could for them so long as one believed their rotten story, but they were a loathsome crew."

She shivered reminiscently.

"They are passing away from my memory like an evil dream," she sighed.

"Shouldn't waste another thought upon them," Andrew enjoined. "You have something much more wonderful to think about, little sweetheart—your father. What a fine fellow!"

There were tears of happiness in her eyes.

"Isn't he wonderful? And, dearest, I knew—I knew the moment he looked at me!"

"I am almost as proud of him as I am of his daughter," Andrew declared, holding her a little more tightly. "We will have to do our best to give

him a good time. Fancy ten years in prison, under any conditions, for a man who was almost the ruler of his country!"

"He will be happy with us," Félice murmured.

There was a brief period of eloquent silence. Then Félice raised her head from her husband's shoulder. Once more the shadow of fear had crept into her eyes.

"The time has come now, Andrew," she whispered, "when I must make a confession to you. It has hurt me very much to keep silent, but indeed I could not see what else there was for me to do. Listen to me, dear," she went on, clutching at his arm. "Not at the inquest, not to you, never to any one, have I been quite honest about that awful night."

"I have always known that, my dear," he assured her, with a calm which bordered almost upon indifference.

"I am not very good at deceiving," she went on. "I have never tried it before, and it hurt. Remember, I had promised to keep their secret, and I believed Charles to be my brother. That night when he came to Glenlitten, I nearly fainted. I made myself brave, though. I listened. He was in great need, he said. There was something which must be done. He must see me alone. Very well. I retired. He came to me in my boudoir. We were talking. He had begun to explain about a great money difficulty that he was in. He asked if I could not find money, or some bonds, or jewellery—anything. Whilst we talked, some one

stopped in the corridor outside. I believe now that it was Mr. Haslam, and that he had seen Charles come upstairs. I was terrified. I lost my head, for I was in my dressing gown, and who was to know that Charles was my brother? I motioned quite wildly to him to leave me. He passed into the bathroom. From there, I thought that he would go through my room and out on to the corridor. I know now that he did not."

"Pretty desperate fellow, Charles," Andrew remarked encouragingly.

"Afterwards I undressed and went to bed, wondering what I could do to help him. Then, whilst I was half asleep, a terrifying thing happened. Some one called out my name. I sprang up. The door of my bathroom was thrown open, and De Besset stood there. Something gripped my throat, and there was a singing in my ears. I could not speak. I could not hear what De Besset called out to me. But I could see—horrible things. I saw some one—the burglar—with a mask upon his face, crawling through the window, and I also saw—something else!"

There was a break in her voice. Her hands had become as cold as ice. He laid his cheek against hers.

"Don't hurry, darling," he whispered. "Rest for a little time. You can tell me later."

She seemed scarcely to hear him. Her fingers gripped his. Her eyes, round and glazed with fear, were fixed upon the wall.

"It was the figure of a man—a blurred shape, leaning against the other side of the dressing table," she went on. "He was leaning over the place where I had left my jewels. Andrew, I thank God that I could not see his face, for all the time that hideous fear has been with me—it may have been Charles. He may never have left my bedroom. He may have hidden in the cupboard—the cupboard Sir Richard asked questions about. Whoever it was, he must have seen De Besset, and he may have fired that shot. The flash seemed to come from there. I saw it—a little pencil of red flame. Then I fainted."

Andrew smoked his pipe thoughtfully for a moment.

"I always felt there was something like that, dear," he acknowledged. "You mustn't take it too seriously, though. Remember that the tragical side of the situation has gone, now that we know the truth about the young man. Of course, it won't be pleasant for you to have to go into the box and tell the whole story, especially now that Charles turns out to be no relation at all, but every one will understand, and what does that matter against a man's life? You just tell the truth, dear, and Mr. Charles must take his chance. I fancy he's a wrong 'un, anyway. I know I had jolly hard work to keep myself from pounding him, when I saw him with his arm around your waist, after that dancing lesson. I knew there must be some sort of explanation, of course, but it made me see red for the moment."

"You were simply wonderful," she whispered. "I was so proud that you trusted me."

There was a moment's silence. Félice sprang up, lit a cigarette, and returned to her place. She curled herself up with a little sigh of content. Already her mercurial temperament was reasserting itself. Andrew knew everything. Once more she was happy.

"I think the best thing we can do is to see Dick," Andrew decided. "He'd better have the whole story. I don't think you need worry, dear. You see, you can't swear to anything. You can't say for certain that there was any one else in the room. On the other hand, your evidence will immensely weaken the case against Drayton. He'll get off, without a doubt, and, unless some one saw Charles leave your room after the shot was fired, I don't see that there'll ever be any evidence against him either."

There was a knock at the door. A servant entered, with a formal-looking missive reposing upon a tray.

"This has come from Scotland Yard, my lord," he announced. "Parkins thought you had better have it, as it was marked 'important.' "

Andrew tore open the envelope. Félice read it over his shoulder:

The Chief Commissioner of Police begs to inform Lord Glenlitten that his necklace has been returned, and the reward of ten thousand pounds is claimed. The Chief Commissioner will be glad if Lord Glen-

litten will arrange to identify the necklace some time to-morrow. The person claiming the reward is a private detective—Mr. Felix Main.

"Well, I'm damned!" was Andrew's only comment.

CHAPTER XXX

Sir Richard Cotton and Haslam had met by accident, walking down Pall Mall early that evening. They were standing upon the pavement engaged in a somewhat disjointed conversation, when they became aware of a taxicab stopping with dangerous suddenness against the kerbstone by their side. A tall young man alighted and advanced eagerly towards them.

"Our Russian acquaintance!" Sir Richard remarked drily. "He appears to have something to say to us."

Haslam studied the newcomer through his deep-set eyes without change of countenace.

"In the interests of your client, Max Drayton, I should listen to whatever the young man chooses to tell you," he advised.

Charles approached, a little breathless, otherwise apparently normal, except that his collar was somewhat crushed and one of his sleeve links seemed to be missing.

"Sir Richard," he confided, "I have something important to say to you. Is there anywhere we can be alone for a moment? Believe me, you will not regret it."

The lawyer hesitated. Haslam whispered in his ear.

"Never mind whether it's professional or not, do as

he asks, if you wish to save Max Drayton from the scaffold," he insisted.

"We will step into the waiting room of my club," Sir Richard suggested. "It is next door here. I will certainly hear what you have to say."

"There is great need for haste," Charles continued feverishly.

"Do you mind Mr. Haslam coming along?" Sir Richard asked. "If what you have to say has anything to do with a certain night, his presence might be an advantage."

The young man signified assent with a hasty gesture.

"You must give me a drink," he begged, as soon as they had reached the waiting room. "It will be worth your while."

Sir Richard ordered a brandy and soda, half of which the recipient drank before he began his statement.

"On the night you speak of, at Glenlitten Hall, that little fool of a woman, who had been gulled into believing that I, the son of her father's old servant, was her brother, gave me a few minutes' interview in her sitting room. We were interrupted by footsteps outside—yours, I believe, Mr. Haslam. She waved me away, imagining I would leave by the bathroom and through her bedroom. I did nothing of the sort. I concealed myself in a portion of her wardrobe. I had come to Glenlitten to steal the jewels and I meant to have them."

He paused for another drink and went on, the choked words stumbling hurriedly from his lips.

"What happened was ridiculous, as real fact, although one might swallow it in a film picture. I—the devil's own luck—passed through the bedroom too quickly to notice the jewels lying upon the dressing table, and it was not until after I was hidden in the wardrobe that I realised, peering through a crack above the hinges, that I might have walked straight away with the necklace. My supposed sister was in bed then, so I had to wait until she was asleep. When at last I thought the moment had come, I stole out, just as Drayton was peering in through the window. Whilst I was wondering what to do, De Besset burst into the room. I had gone too far for retreat, and the necklace was within a few inches of me. I shot De Besset with a revolver which will be found on or near me very shortly, and I should have shot the burglar too, if he hadn't scrambled down his ladder, half dead with fright. I escaped downstairs, owing to the burglar's scheme of darkness, with the necklace in my trousers pocket, and was dancing before any alarm was given. This is to say, in brief, that it was I who shot De Besset, and, so far as I know, the burglar was not in possession of any weapon at all."

"The revolver belonging to his brother-in-law that was found?" Sir Richard began.

The young Russian held out his hand.

"The second part of my story explains that," he

announced. "How to dispose of the necklace—it bothered me! I came up against a man who called himself a private detective—Felix Main. He agreed to help me dispose of the jewels and divide the spoils. He also undertook to arrange things so that I should never be suspected of the murder, and it was he who procured, through a man whom he had once helped, the revolver belonging to Drayton's brother-in-law. We threw it into the wood near the spot where Drayton had left his car, knowing that some day or other it would be found."

"Stop a moment!" Sir Richard interrupted, taking some paper from a rack. "Hadn't I better take this down?"

"Wait till I have finished," Charles insisted. "You shall take it down presently. I was going to write it myself at a café. It is better for you to do it. I went to Felix Main to-day for money. I found he had double-crossed me. He had decided the game was too dangerous. He had taken the necklace to Scotland Yard and claimed the reward. He mocked at me when I demanded my share. He intended to have the whole. He reminded me that a word from him, and I should be charged with the murder. It was blackmail—flagrant and brutal. I took him up in my arms—I am strong sometimes; he had a gun but he was too frightened to use it properly. I shook the life out of him, and there he lies in his office."

"My God!" Sir Richard cried. "Do you mean that you killed him?"

"Twenty minutes ago," the young man assented, with a strange flash in his eyes, "and if ever a living being deserved it, he did. Now then, on to paper with it, Sir Richard. I am trusting you, mind, because there is no chance of my escape, with these two things up against me, but when I've signed, I walk out of this room. I will not have a policeman's hand upon my shoulder. I choose my own punishment."

The lawyer sat down at the table and began to write. Charles rang the bell and coolly ordered another brandy and soda, which he consumed in hasty gulps. Presently Sir Richard, his task completed, leaned back in his chair, and in his dull, legal voice read what he had written. The young man nodded assent, snatched up a pen and signed his name. Sir Richard and Haslam signed as witnesses, and the former placed the paper in his pocket.

"Now what are you going to do?" he asked Charles.

The latter stood up and looked out into the street.

"If I can get so far," he confided, "I am going to a little café near here where I shall drink. When the time comes, I shall know what to do. You need not interfere," he warned them. "No one else shall suffer, only I am going my own way."

The two men exchanged glances.

"In the light of what you have confessed, Charles Protinoff," the lawyer began—

"Don't be a fool," the young man interrupted. "I have half a dozen cartridges in my automatic now,

and I am strong enough to crush you both to death if I felt like it. Die I must, I know, but I shall die my own way."

They were both men of presence of mind, of courage and enterprise, and yet he left them standing there and departed, slamming the door behind him. On the steps of the club, however, he stopped short. His taxicab was still waiting at the kerb, but a very official-looking and alert man in plain clothes was standing by its side. Two policemen were crossing the street; another, who had been talking to the commissionaire, left him and approached. Charles's hand flashed from his pocket, there were two sharp reports, and he collapsed upon the pavement. As he fell, he threw the pistol to Sir Richard, who had rushed out.

"I killed De Besset with that," he confessed falteringly. "I regret."

Once more the same decrepit taxicab rumbled along the stately avenue of Glenlitten Hall. Notwithstanding previous warnings, the driver again pulled up before the great main entrance, and in due course a woman descended—a woman who looked as though she had slept in her clothes in a bedchamber peopled with horrible dreams. Lily Drayton—"Lil" to her intimates—had forgotten all about cosmetics. Nothing remained of her showy looks but her eyes, still, notwithstanding their terrified light, large and beautiful.

"I must see Lady Glenlitten," she begged of Parkins, who had opened the door.

He looked at her sympathetically, but there was a certain mild reproach in his tone.

"Her ladyship only motored down from London last night, and it is barely ten o'clock, madame."

"Her ladyship saw me last time I came," the woman reminded him. "She promised she would see me at any time. I've been up nearly all night and I've driven over from Winchester this morning. You must tell her ladyship, please."

Parkins ushered her into a sitting room. He was a kindly person, and he felt somehow in touch with the full drama of life when he saw, for the second time, the pitiable condition of this woman whose husband, as the whole household knew full well, was lying in Winchester Jail under the shadow of a terrible death.

"You would like some coffee?" he asked.

"Nothing at all, thank you," she said. "Just her ladyship, please—as soon as she can see me. I must speak to her. I can think of nothing else."

"Her ladyship is down, I believe," Parkins confided. "I will let her know that you are here."

He departed, and the woman walked restlessly up and down the room. The agony of that last quarter of an hour's interview with her panic-stricken husband was still tearing at her heart strings. Presently Félice came in.

"Mrs. Drayton!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad

that you are here. Won't you please sit down?

The woman was almost beside herself. She stood in the middle of the room, shaking from head to foot—dumb horror burning in her eyes.

"My lady," she cried, "I cannot sit down, I cannot sleep, I cannot eat, I cannot drink. This morning I was allowed to see Max. They told him yesterday that the day of Assizes is fixed. He will be tried for murder—the sixth of next month. Sir Richard has no more news for him. They all think at the jail —I can tell by their manner and so can he—that he's in for it. My lady, he's crazy. He never did it. You know he didn't do it, but you haven't said a word—nothing has happened, and the days go on."

"Please stop!" Félice begged. "Stop and I will tell you something."

"But I can't stop until I ask you this," the woman continued, her voice rising almost to an hysterical shriek. "This I must know—this Max must know—every one must know. You *do* know that it wasn't Max. It may have been some one dear to you, it may have been some one who should not have been in your room, you may have to suffer for telling the truth, but you wouldn't let an innocent man hang? Oh, my lady there's something in your face which tells me you wouldn't do that. Give me a message for Max. He knows that only you can save him, and he'll die if I don't give him some hope."

Félice leaned over and held the woman by the shoulders.

"Now please listen," she insisted. "Your husband will be proved innocent. You hear that? Innocent! Don't work yourself up like this. Sit down."

The woman collapsed into a chair. She sat with her eyes fastened upon Félice, moistening her hard, withered lips with her tongue.

"A very terrible thing has happened," Félice confided, "and yet perhaps it is for the best. It was the young Russian who claimed to be my brother who stole the necklace and killed the Comte de Besset. He has confessed and shot himself. Now listen, Mrs. Drayton. Bear up, if you please, and listen. There is no more question of your husband being concerned in the murder. That is finished. You can go and tell him so. Charles Protinoff, or De Suess, as he called himself then—a guest who had dined in the house—killed the Comte de Besset, because he interfered when he was trying to steal my necklace. He has confessed. Sir Richard Cotton has his signed confession. You are listening carefully? Your husband will never be charged."

The woman seemed scarcely to have fainted, but to have passed into a state of numb inertia; to be absolutely incapable of speech or movement. Félice rang the bell and gave hurried orders. Parkins brought coffee, her maid some sal volatile. In time a thin streak of colour came back to the woman's face. Her breathing grew more regular, her eyes less glazed. Her fingers ceased their convulsive twitching.

"I shall be all right in a moment," she faltered. "I'm coming back. I sha'n't faint. Say that over again, my lady—slowly."

"Your husband will never be charged with the murder of the Comte de Besset," Félice repeated, leaning over her. "The murderer was hidden in my room, and he has confessed. It will be in the papers to-night. Sir Richard Cotton, your husband's lawyer, has a signed copy of his confession."

"Oh, thank Gawd!" the woman groaned. "Thank Gawd! Oh, my lady!"

The tears and some strong coffee revived her, and she staggered to her feet.

"I must go," she cried. "Perhaps they haven't told Max. Anyway, they'll let me see him. They'll *have* to let me see him. Perhaps I'll be the first to tell him."

"Wait!" Félice enjoined. "I shall give you a letter to the governor of the jail and to Major Hartopp. Of course you must see him."

Félice sat down at the desk and wrote rapidly. Then, with the letters clasped in her hand, they helped the dazed woman into the taxicab. Félice watched it rattle its way down the avenue until it became a lumbering speck in the distance.

Andrew found her there a few minutes later.

"Your father and I object to this long desertion," he complained. "Dear old fellow, he's coming out with me after the partridges, and he's fussing

whether he'll take a twelve or a twenty bore. Whatever are you thinking about, sweetheart?"

She clung to him tightly.

"I was thinking," she sighed, "that there are very many different sorts of good women in the world."

THE END